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ABSTRACT

The four papers in this collection are intended to stimulate debate in the adult education sector and to set the agenda for further development work. "Learning Outcomes: Towards a Synthesis of Progress" (Peter Lavender) provides a summary of recent efforts to identify, record, and value learning that does not lead to qualifications. "Learning Outcomes in a Non-Accredited Curriculum: A View from the Adult Education Sector" (John Vorhaus) distinguishes between learning outcomes and other outcomes of involvement in learning. It pays particular attention to the learner's perspective and the consequent issues that arise in measuring achievement. "'Standards' and the Measurement of the Learning Outcomes of Adult Students in Further Education" (Amanda Hayes) addresses the need to measure the most important outcomes of learning and the difficulty in establishing standards that are comparable and can contribute to value added measures. "Encouraging Adult Achievement" (Anna Reisenberger) sets the debate in the context of new policies for funding, inspection, and quality improvement that are being developed for the Learning and Skills Council. (YLB)

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Outcomes of adult learning – taking the debate forward

Amanda Hayes
Peter Lavender
Anna Reisenberger
John Vorhaus

Published by FEDA

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Introduction

The debate on how to recognise and value the broader outcomes of adult learning is not a new debate. The papers within this publication illustrate the discussions a number of adult educators have had over the years.

In 1997, FEDA published *A sense of achievement: the outcomes of adult learning*, which traced the development of strategies to identify learning outcomes. It also addressed the practicalities of measuring adult learners' achievements that do not lead to formal qualifications. This work was taken forward in a project conducted by a group of London adult educators, with financial support from FEFC and advice from NIACE. It has been given added impetus by the Government's aims to both widen participation and raise standards.

The Learning and Skills Council will have responsibility for a wide range of learners who will learn in different ways and different settings. The challenge is how to devise robust standards, which are sensitive to the needs of all potential students, if we are to encourage adults and disenchanted young people to become lifelong learners.

The papers in this collection (apart from the paper by John Vorhaus, which was written in response to Peter Lavender's paper) were presented at the Further Education Research Network (FERN) conference in December 1999. They are being published jointly by FEDA and NIACE to stimulate debate in the sector and to set the agenda for further development work.

Peter Lavender is Assistant Director at NIACE. In Chapter 1, Peter summarises recent efforts to identify, record and value learning which does not lead to qualifications.

Chapter 2 is written by John Vorhaus, Head of Humanities at the Mary Ward Centre in London. In his paper, John distinguishes between learning outcomes and other outcomes of involvement in learning. He pays particular attention to the learner's perspective and the consequent issues that arise in measuring achievement.

Amanda Hayes is Vice Principal at Kensington and Chelsea College, where the vast majority of students are adult learners. In Chapter 3, she addresses the need to measure the most important outcomes of learning and the difficulty in establishing standards that are comparable and can contribute to value added measures.

Anna Reisenberger is manager of the Raising Quality and Achievement Programme, funded through the DfEE's Standards Fund, at FEDA. Anna's paper (Chapter 4) sets the debate in the context of new policies for funding, inspection and quality improvement, which are being developed for the Learning and Skills Council.

Learning outcomes: towards a synthesis of progress

Peter Lavender

There is a growing acknowledgement of the importance of recognising the diversity of outcomes from learning. This is as true in higher education as it is in adult and further education.[1]

Background

This paper is about finding ways to identify, record and value learning, which does not result in a qualification.

The need to identify learning outcomes has arisen for three pragmatic reasons:

- The need to show that programmes without accreditation can be just as rigorously evaluated in terms of students' achievements as those which are accredited
- The need to produce robust evidence of student achievement over time as a means of underpinning quality assurance systems and to show evidence to funders and inspectors
- The wish to encourage greater understanding of learning on the part of tutors and students; to assess students' learning and to identify outcomes sensitive to students' needs.

From 2001, there will be one funding agency (the Learning and Skills Council) and one inspectorate for adult learning.[2] It is likely that the current Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) way of doing things will be a strong influence on the new Learning and Skills Council and the new inspectorate. The FEFC has funded non-schedule 2 pilot projects at a cost of £10 million per year[3] and there is a wish to evaluate the learning of students for whom provision is made. In addition, major providers of non-accredited adult education, such as the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), local education authorities (LEAs), and colleges, have indicated their wish to have learning outcomes properly researched and recorded as part of their quality assurance arrangements. The WEA has led on this subject and all provision within the WEA is included within the WEA learning outcomes strategy.[4] Other agencies with an interest in quality include FEDA[5] and the FEFC. The FEFC's Chief Inspector's annual report notes:

...the need for colleges to improve the quality of data they hold about their students and to encourage more dialogue between teachers and administrative staff responsible for data preparation and analysis.[6]

The Chief Inspector's report suggests that there should be systematic research in colleges in order to give colleges 'the understanding they need' to improve levels of student retention and achievement and to raise standards.[7] Included in 'colleges' is the WEA, Morley College, Northern College, Mary Ward Centre, the City Lit and the many FE colleges with non-schedule 2 provision funded by either the FEFC or their LEA. Both the FEFC and LEAs are substantial providers of non-accredited education for adults. The significance of data on student achievement has been reinforced in other publications. For

example, providers are expected to record both qualitative and quantitative data on achievement and then to ensure that it is benchmarked against national data and used to form a self-assessment of the quality of provision in each institution.[8] This self-assessment is then used by inspectors and auditors as a key document from which to plan and carry out an assessment of the quality of provision. Strong messages about quantitative data are hard for colleges to ignore, however:

Inspectors have found that in the better self-assessment reports the evidence quoted to support curriculum judgements often includes:

- *Three-year trends in achievement and retention rates measured against national averages and other benchmarking data*
- *Average attendance rates and patterns of attendance*
- *Arrangements for tracking students' progress*
- *A summary of student achievements outside their main studies.*[9]

The result must inevitably be an assumption by colleges and others that qualitative data is not so important, or that qualitative data must somehow be quantified in order to be useful. Probably the greatest assumption being made is that qualifications are the only important set of data in relation to achievement, whereas in reality they are just one (albeit important) indicator. The truth is that qualifications are only a proxy for quality, a necessary but not sufficient condition of measuring students' achievements.[10]

Student retention rates

Retention rates can be relatively easily extracted since, in the majority of cases, there are good records on students' intended length of stay as against their actual length of stay. Of course, there are problematic areas. These include:

- Students who leave early for positive reasons, such as a job or a more appropriate course at another institution
- Others who leave for reasons outside the control of the institution or staff insufficient money to continue, personal tragedy, family difficulty, illness or employment problems. None of these reasons implies that there is something poor about the quality of what is provided
- Students who come and go as they feel the need arises, as in literacy or ICT drop in or on-line sessions. How should retention be calculated in these instances?

The challenge is to identify benchmark data which an institution and its staff can use to assess the retention rates against previous performance and against fair and representative sector data. How retention rates are arrived at is of concern to all, however. The FEFC has defined the journey towards achievement of a qualification, as:

The percentage of qualifications which the students have completed as expected (or are continuing with the prospect of late completion). For programmes of study of two years or more, retention is calculated across the whole programme, that is, from the start to the end of the qualification.[11]

It is important that for non-accredited provision the retention rate is calculated as the number of students remaining at the end of the course or their individual learning programme.

Attendance

Unlike retention, attendance is not considered relevant to achievement, but it is a significant theme for benchmarking and quality assurance. Attendance rates and patterns of attendance can help institutions identify weak areas, current or future problems, or provide benchmarks for quality assurance purposes. The same challenges apply to non-accredited provision as for accredited courses:

- How to monitor attendance of drop-in courses
- How to identify relevant attendance rates for residential courses
- Where to find fair benchmarks in the sector.

Progression

A fundamental part of measuring achievement must be the use of data on progression. As one college principal said:

This must be the paramount indicator of success for an educational institution – are people in jobs, earning more money, off welfare, living independently? Yet because it is expensive and difficult to collect, the information (outside the sixth form college sector) is generally worthless.[12]

Progression measurements for adult learners must be fit for purpose, collected properly and used effectively. They need not be linear or hierarchical, since maintenance of skills is as important as improvement to some groups of learners.[13] The FEFC does not normally use progression data in its reports on inspections, or expect colleges to use progression as one of the six performance indicators.

Key issues on progression, which are the same for accredited and non-accredited programmes, are how to:

- Show sideways progression and maintenance of skills (as in the case of students with mental health difficulties)
- Show unanticipated progression by students
- Be sure that progression was causally related to the course
- Include all significant progression data for each individual (particularly important for adults with learning difficulties).

Progression within the learning programme is expected in programmes in schedule 2 (j). Here the funding from the FEFC for colleges providing opportunities for students with learning difficulties follows evidence of 'progression' rather than evidence of achieving the qualification (although qualifications are sometimes taken as proxy for progression). Ways of showing that students make progress depends on effective initial assessment, which can also be diagnostic. Progression within or beyond the course may be the only way in which funding can be drawn down for non-accredited programmes.

Achievement

There are currently few education providers who collate data on what students learn on non-accredited programmes in a form that is robust enough for inspection or funding purposes. In turn, this leads to problems when setting benchmarks or developing useful performance indicators on achievement. For this reason a working group[14] has looked at some of the best practice in post-compulsory education in order to address the challenge set by, among others, the FEFC inspectors:

Aspects of self assessment which require further attention include:
...attention to the links between student achievement and levels of retention, and the quality of provision.[15]

Learning outcomes

Assessing learning outcomes is a challenge that could have wider benefits than simply being a means of recording achievement in non-accredited courses. For example, a learning outcomes approach would theoretically allow all outcomes – including those in courses leading to a qualification – to be identified, assessed and used to evaluate progress. This is what the WEA does now. This approach would allow institutions to identify and record, 'a summary of student achievement outside their main studies'[16] such as the skills of running a student association or giving a talk in public. Such an approach was called for by Ofsted[17]:

Both adult education and youth services need to give more attention to identifying and recording the outcomes of the whole range of their work and not simply that which is externally accredited...

There are several difficulties in using a learning outcomes approach. These were identified in a FEDA report[18] and turned into 38 questions under these headings:

- **The intentional framework:** what is the purpose of the scheme, will evidence of intended and unanticipated outcomes be collected, will the process be led by managers, tutors or students?
- **The mechanics:** how will learning outcomes be explained, what is acceptable evidence?
- **The 'learning process' outcomes (during the learning period):** will the scheme acknowledge learning gains at different stages?
- **The 'harvest' outcomes (at the end of the learning period):** how will the outcomes be gathered, how will the evidence be assessed and by whom?
- **The ecological issues:** are the benefits worth the effort, does it benefit enough people?
- **The resource issue:** is the scheme manageable and administratively possible?
- **Evaluation:** what are the benefits to the organisation, what is the value added for individuals, organisations and nationally?

The Mary Ward Centre identified more philosophical difficulties[19] in response to the FEDA report, which included the need for:

- A clear definition of a 'learning outcome'
- A clear, workable definition of common terms like understanding, skill and competence
- Standards of verification required to confirm that (a) learning has taken place and (b) that learning is connected to teaching
- A way to acknowledge cumulative, long-term and unpredicted learning outcomes
- A way to acknowledge intrinsic 'goods' as elements of learning.

Other difficulties, noted by the WEA[20], are that learning outcomes need to:

- Provide a sound basis of comparison within subject areas
- Provide a reasonable basis of comparison between subject areas
- Be written effectively by well-briefed tutors
- Be supported by guidance to students about how they can be used to assess their own progress.

In addition, there is a broader need to measure the 'value added' to students and the qualifications they pursue. The Kennedy Report argues for a:

...nationally agreed system of 'learning gain' [which] is urgently required. This would provide a way of understanding and valuing all achievement.[21]

An FEFC report, published to support the implementation of the Kennedy Report[22], suggested nine elements of good practice, which included:

Mechanisms for recording students' achievements, which acknowledge all learning, are meaningful to students and are recognised by employers, education providers and others.

The FEFC's current inspection research work on 'value added' includes the question of what value added means when there are no qualifications appropriate, as in the case of provision for students with learning difficulties. With the ideal curriculum for such students being an individual targeted curriculum, individual learning outcomes need to be set against the original individual assessment. But how then can targets be set that are about the whole cohort when the assessment, the curriculum and the achievements are entirely individual? The questions being asked by inspectors in Programme area 10 include[23]:

- What information about students' achievement does the college use to monitor the quality of its provision?
- What information do course teams use to help them set performance targets for individual students?
- How are targets linked to students' previous performance?
- What evidence can the college show of improvements in retention and achievements as a result of its approach to value added?

Students' achievements

Quality statement	Indicative sources of evidence
3a. The college sets suitable targets for the performance of individuals and targets	• Data on attendance, completion/retention, examination results/other achievements, added value, progression, destinations • National targets for education and training
3b. Students' work is of an appropriate standard and where appropriate demonstrates vocational competence	• Course documents • Awarding body requirements • Moderators'/verifiers' reports • Students' records of achievement • Students' notes, written assignments and practical work • Lesson observation • Views of employers
3c. Students perform well in examinations and/or other types of formal assessment	• Examination and other results • The college's analysis of students' results • National statistics • Data on added value • Data on retention/completion
3d. Targets for student retention/ completion are set and met	• Analysis of data on retention, completion and progression • Records of actions taken to improve performance • National statistics
3e. Students' other achievements are recognised and valued	• Information on awards, prizes, grants, scholarships, projects, performances, exhibitions, sporting achievements • Students records of achievement • Work-related achievements
3f. Students attain their primary goals in terms of progression, for example, to other further education courses, higher education or employment	• Students' records • Analysis of data in students' destinations including further training and employment

Inspection frameworks

The Ofsted framework used for monitoring adult education provision in LEAs offers seven quality statements, or prompts under 'student achievement' for which evidence/key documents need to be cited. The assessor then notes, 'areas of strength' and 'areas for development'. The prompts include:

- Students achieve their personal learning goals
- Students achieve suitable accreditation goals
- Students achieve an appropriate standard of knowledge, skills and understanding
- Students demonstrate personal development
- Students demonstrate competence as learners
- Students attain their goals in terms of completion and progression[24]
- Students show a high level of satisfaction.

Such broad criteria match the framework set out by the FEFC in 1997[25]. Under 'student achievement' the FEFC Circular suggests indicative sources of evidence to support the criteria[26]:

The Training Standards Council's standards on achievements are similar[27]:

- Goals are agreed with each trainee
- Demanding targets for completion, qualification and progression are set and met
- Trainees are punctual and attentive and they attend as required
- Trainees work without supervision when appropriate
- Trainees' work is of an appropriate standard and demonstrates requisite occupational competence
- Trainees' progress is monitored and recorded
- Trainees make significant progress towards fulfiling their goals and their potential
- Trainees' achievements are appropriately recorded and accredited
- Success rates of individual training organisations compare well with local and national averages.

Suggested sources of evidence

- Observation of trainees and their work during training
- Interviews with trainees, work-based supervisors and trainers
- Documentation relating to trainees' achievements, such as: trainees' records; trainees' personal development plans; examples of trainees' work and portfolios; documents on target-setting; average rates of achievement as a proportion of the number of trainees who started with the provider; internal verifiers' reports; documents on target-setting; average rates of achievement as a proportion of the number of trainees who started with the provider; internal verifiers' reports; documents relating to certification; regional and national averages for trainees' performance.

- External assessments, such as those of awarding bodies and standards organisations, and feedback from employers.

Attempts have been made to merge the demands of the Ofsted and FEFC inspection frameworks which both aim to cover provision for adults. HOLEX, for example, produced a working draft for a self-review framework based on a synthesis of both frameworks. Under 'student achievement' the HOLEX document includes:

- Specification of learning goals
- Standard of work
- Personal development
- Achievement of intended learning outcomes
- Student progression.[28]

The frameworks do not, in themselves, cause problems to providers and inspectors of non-accredited provision. What causes difficulties is the nature of the evidence required to indicate both achievement and progression. It is the FEFC framework which has caused most difficulties; not because the criteria are challenging, but because of the dominant emphasis on students' (quantitative) achievement of nationally recognised qualifications.[29] Parry (1999) makes the point that using the pass rate for qualifications as a benchmark is only measuring one form of student achievement.[30]

Ways forward

Before moving to ways of collating and using learning outcome data, it is important to consider some of the ways forward in response to the barriers already mentioned. Vorhaus (1998)[31], like FEDA[32], carefully analyses many of the definitional and validity difficulties of learning outcomes, including what are learning outcomes (as opposed to any other kind of outcome); how can we show that learning is causally related to teaching or a period of educational activity; and how do we take account of learning which happens long after a course has finished?

Not all outcomes experienced by the learner are learning outcomes. For example, if a student sells a tutor his/her car, that is an outcome but it is not a learning outcome. The achievement of the course's learning objectives as set out by the tutor would be an intended learning outcome, such as understanding the arguments for and against Jeremy Bentham's concept of 'utilitarianism'. If, during background reading on Bentham's life, a student gains new insights into the evolution of criminal and civil law in the 19th century, or learns for the first time to share her views in a large group of other students, then this might be described as an unanticipated learning outcome, or even value added to the intended learning outcome. Learning outcomes relate to intention. Vorhaus (1998) suggests that there has to be a causal connection between teaching (what is intended) and learning if we are to argue that learning outcomes derive from something initiated by the tutor. However, a student taking a GCSE English course might study on their own and attend no lectures but still pass the certificate. This suggests that students' achievements do not necessarily have to directly relate to any programme of teaching, and yet ordinarily achievement data is reasonably ascribed to that cohort of students. Not all outcomes are learning outcomes and not all learning outcomes can be anticipated.

Some of the best learning outcomes schemes collect data on the extent to which students achieve intended outcomes (the aims of the course,) as well as personal learning outcomes (e.g. confidence) or unanticipated learning outcomes[33]. It is perfectly reasonable for a provider of education to claim that both intended and unanticipated learning outcomes indicate student achievement. There is a parallel in certificated work. In the case of students following a GCE A-level Sociology course we would say that achievement of the A-level qualification was an intended learning outcome; achieving it at a higher level than predicted or learning to run the students' association, was the anticipated learning outcome, or value added to being at college. A reasonable definition of learning outcome might be:

that it is a causally related outcome of a period of teaching or a specified period of education.

A second concern is how to ensure that learning outcomes are written well by students and tutors, and written in a way which allows the causal connection between teaching and learning to be recognised so that the learning is verifiable. Part of this challenge rests in the area of tutor training and student briefing, recognised by the WEA as fundamental to its learning outcomes strategy.[34] If tutors and students have a common understanding of what they are declaring as outcomes then the process is a lot easier. One way forward, as Howgate (1999) suggests, is to ensure that guidelines are given to tutors on how to devise a limited number of learning outcomes on a rising scale of complexity.[35]

Once tutors adopt the idea of having only six intended learning outcomes for their programmes, it might be easier to write more rigorous learning outcomes and make comparisons across subject areas within an overall programme area. Howgate also suggests that achievement can then be measured and targets and benchmarks created by counting the number of ticks ('I think I can do this'; 'I am working towards this'; 'I cannot yet do this') against each of the six intended learning outcomes in the three levels. Experimenting with these ideas in curriculum areas other than science needs attention, as does experimenting with different styles for students in ESOL or with learning difficulties.

A third concern, raised by Vorhaus, are the standards of verification required to confirm that learning has taken place and that the learning is causally connected to teaching. Students will learn in spite of

Number of intended outcomes per level	Form of intended outcomes	Example of one intended outcome per level
1–3. Data/concept collection	Straightforward knowledge retention of factual information, such as key facts, observations and concepts	• Recognise with some confidence major rock types and main groups of fossil organisms
4 and 5. Analysis	Basic data and concepts, such as giving practical examples of a theory or putting data into a conceptual framework	• Have an appreciation of the scientific basis behind many natural hazards
6. Synthesis	Deduction of new information from data put into a conceptual framework	• Make logical deductions about past environments from an examination of field evidence

teachers and independently of them. Teachers can adopt systems to check that learning has taken place, but fundamental to the principles of adult learning is a trust in learners to know whether they have achieved the objectives identified, moderated by tutors and their managers. Internal verification by subject leaders or curriculum managers would be helpful here.

A rigorous initial assessment followed up by a review is one way of being reasonably sure that new learning was the result of teaching or the course attended. This is accepted good practice for individuals with learning difficulties or disabilities, and in basic skills or ESOL programmes.[36] Other ways include the evidence from students. Unanticipated learning can often result from attending courses. There is no need to prove causality here; the issue for education providers is to collate this information in a meaningful way. A 'reasonable belief' that the teaching or the educational activity has led to learning is probably enough. This is not an exact science. What is important is that any claim about learning should be reasonably verifiable.

A fourth area of concern is how to measure cumulative outcomes or learning outcomes which relate to community capacity building rather than individual benefit. How do you take account of learning which derives from a number of courses, or learning which takes place after a long time? Much learning is gradual or cumulative ('granulated' perhaps[37]) and this needs to be acknowledged. It may be that these learning outcomes will be captured at a later time but this is no different from the learning that people may recognise years after they have taken a qualification; it is not just a problem related to to learning outcomes where there is no accreditation. A useful additional measure of learning here is progression. In the case of students with learning difficulties, for example, the extent to which they progress to college vocational courses, to independent living or to taking part in a self-advocacy group can be captured as part of 'progression' data which for some particular courses would be important data to keep.

A fifth concern is that often what is measured is what is easy to measure. John Vorhaus's paper suggests a bias in favour of the easy-to-identify and easy-to-confirm:

but the fact that an outcome may be hard to identify or confirm is no reason to regard it as any less valuable than outcomes that are easier to reach.[38]

Some rigour in writing intended outcomes and careful analysis of what students record as their learning outcomes at the end (or during the course) are important, particularly where they are set against intentions or a mutual individual initial assessment. Some outcomes do not match objectives, are unpredictable or unanticipated. In many ways these outcomes are a surprise to tutors and learners. But this happens in programmes with qualifications too; it is a general challenge that is often described as value added. To some extent the unanticipated outcomes can be predicted[39] and they can be so well predicted that such achievements can be measured. La Valle and Finch (1999) found that only 17% of adult learners reported the desire to meet other people as one of the reasons for starting a course but 35% reported this as an outcome from their course. Similarly, more people in 'non-taught' learning learned more than they thought they would and in all courses over 40% of

learners found they had gained confidence; far more than those who thought they would. There are issues here about what students think is appropriate as a learning outcome to communicate to others. There have been some examples of growth in confidence being recognised and included in OCN units as part of accredited programmes.

A sixth concern is about how to measure intrinsic goods such as pleasure in learning. Intrinsic goods are well recognised in adult learning. This is where learners find that their programmes provide:

- Enjoyment
- Pleasure
- Solace
- Social contacts,

and so forth. It has been described as the importance of 'really useless learning'. Pleasure is an intrinsic good, not good because it leads to something else. Recognising this element is important in all learning, not just in courses where there are no qualifications. Recording learning outcomes like these are important for the full picture of achievement, but this is rarely done, except perhaps in 'non-schedule 2'-work in the WEA and City Lit for example. The Wider Benefits of Learning Research Centre.[40] aims to look closely at the non-economic benefits of learning – such as the benefits of learning for a healthier life, for a more fulfilled old age, and for citizenship. Issues about learning outcomes will be fundamental to their studies. Further and adult education providers are not alone, either. In higher education universities are writing their courses in terms of learning outcomes. In Sheffield Hallam, for example, this has resulted in a whole publication and staff support initiative. Defining learning outcomes means focussing students' and teachers' minds on learning rather than teaching.

Practical steps to show that learning has taken place

It is becoming clear that all providers of adult education must think hard about how to measure learning outcomes.

The learners recognise it, the providers and employers recognise it, the inspection services recognise; that adult education is as much valued for the outcomes like 'confidence' 'raised motivation,' 'flexibility' and so on as for formal learning outcomes...[41]

We need to do so because funding for provision that is not accredited is now acceptable across all curriculum areas in order to encourage wider participation in learning. In addition, learn direct will develop a 'learning log' electronically. Each provider will need to develop systems which record learning outcomes, and inspectors will need to take these findings into account when assessing quality. Key ingredients for each provider include routine systems for recording:

- Students' individual needs/interests (students' objectives)
- Tutors' initial objectives
- Some standardisation of how intended outcomes are written
- Students' assessment of the extent to which they have achieved the objectives
- Tutors' moderation of whether students have achieved the desired learning outcomes over a standard period
- Students' unanticipated learning outcomes
- Student's progression within the course and beyond it
- The extent to which each group of students have achieved the intended learning outcomes
- A synthesis of achievements group by group:

a) achievement of intended learning outcomes
b) achievement of unanticipated learning outcomes
c) progression within the course/beyond the course
d) achievement of any qualifications during the course
e) the extent to which benchmarks have been reached/exceeded

- A synthesis of achievement in each curriculum area
- Benchmarks for what might be achieved in the following year
- Standard performance indicators for achievements.

All this without creating a paper chase that terrifies students and de-motivates tutors; a challenge indeed.

Questions for further research

Some key questions for further work now emerge. For providers of lifelong learning opportunities, work on measuring achievement is now urgent, if students' achievements are to be collected and monitored over time, and if these achievements are to be properly included in quality assurance systems. At national level we need urgent attention to learning outcomes if we want to see them properly included in funding and inspection methodology. For everyone involved, including adult learners, we must have greater opportunities to value more than simply the pass rates for qualifications and the retention rates. We need a much richer set of colours on the canvas than we have available now, and some encouragement to providers that such work can be properly assessed for quality and value.

Some questions for further work with adult learners include effective ways of:

- Assessing students at the start of their learning programme and setting intended learning outcomes as a result (for individuals and the group)
- Measuring progression within, and beyond, a course
- Setting intended learning outcomes consistently between tutors and ensuring that tutors and students are briefed to do this
- Collating unanticipated learning outcomes
- Providing comparable evidence of achievement between the same subject area in different places over different years
- Setting performance targets (what and how useful might they be?)
- Funding learning gain where there is no qualification
- Showing achievements in a form which can be scrutinised by external assessors, such as inspectors.

References

[1] Foster P, Howard U, Reisenberger, A. *A sense of achievement: outcomes of adult learning*. FEDA, 1997.

[2] DfEE. *Learning to succeed*, White Paper, June 1999.

[3] FEFC. *Circular 97/12*. FEFC, 1997.

[4] The WEA documentation is substantial and includes the WEA learning outcomes strategy, original documentation by John Daines *et al.* and notes for tutors, etc.

[5] Foster P, Howard U, Reisenberger, A. *A sense of achievement: outcomes of adult learning*. FEDA, 1997.

[6] FEFC. *Chief Inspector's Annual report 1997–98*, para 198. FEFC, 1998.

[7] FEFC. *Chief Inspector's Annual report 1997–98*, para 151. FEFC, 1998.

[8] FEFC. *Effective self-assessment*. FEFC, 1999.

[9] FEFC. 1999 *Effective self-assessment*, para 27. FEFC, 1999.

[10] See the argument in: Perry, A. *Performance indicators in post-16 education – where next?* Unpublished FEDA-IPPR seminar series paper (seminar two), November 1999.

[11] Standard FEFC rubric. See for example WEA inspection report under 'student achievements' in the italicised introduction to the report.

[12] See the argument in: Perry, A. *Performance indicators in post-16 education – where next?* Unpublished FEDA-IPPR seminar series paper (seminar two), November 1999.

[13] HMSO. Inclusive learning – findings of the Tomlinson report. Stationery Office, 1997.

[14] Representatives from City Lit, Kensington and Chelsea College, Mary Ward Centre, NIACE and WEA.

[15] FEFC. *Effective self-assessment* para 73. FEFC, 1999.

[16] FEFC. *Effective self-assessment* para 2. FEFC, 1999.

[17] *Adult education and youth work within local education authorities*. Ofsted, 1996.

[18] Foster P, Howard U, Reisenberger, A. *A sense of achievement: outcomes of adult learning*. FEDA, 1997.

[19] Ward W. *Objectives, outcomes and non-accredited courses: an agenda for FEDA*, 1998 (unpublished).

[20] Howgate M. *Learning outcomes*. WEA, 1999 (unpublished).

[21] FEFC. *Learning works*. FEFC, 1997.

[22] FEFC. *How to make learning work*. FEFC, 1997.

[23] HEFC. Unpublished paper on 'value-added' in programme area 10. HEFC, 1999.

[24] *Local authority adult education: short monitoring inspection commentary*, Ofsted 1999.

[25] FEFC. *Circular 97/12*. FEFC, 1997.

[26] FEFC. *Circular 97/12 annex B: students' achievements*. FEFC, 1997.

[27] Training Standards Council. *Raising the standard*. Training achievements prompts, p20.

[28] Holex. *A self-review framework*. January 1999.

[29] FEFC. *Effective self-assessment*, para 27. FEFC, 1999.

[30] See the argument in: Perry, A. *Performance indicators in post-16 education – where next?* Unpublished FEDA-IPPR seminar series paper (seminar two), November 1999.

[31] Vorhaus J. *Learning outcomes: response to FEDA*. Mary Ward Centre, 1998.

[32] Foster P, Howard U, Reisenberger, A. *A sense of achievement: outcomes of adult learning*. FEDA, 1997.

[33] La Valle I, Finch S. *Pathways in adult learning: summary*. DfEE, 1999.

[34] See, for example, WEA reviews of learning strategy, such as John Daines' work on the evaluation of the learning outcomes strategy in Yorkshire North District.

[35] Howgate M. *Learning outcomes*. WEA, 1999 (unpublished).

[36] See 'value added' discussion.

[37] Bob Fryer.

[38] Vorhaus J. *Learning outcomes: response to FEDA*. Mary Ward Centre, 1998.

[39] La Valle I, Finch S. *Pathways in adult learning: summary*. DfEE, 1999.

[40] London Institute and Birkbeck College, established 1999.

[41] Foster P, Howard U, Reisenberger, A. *A sense of achievement: outcomes of adult learning*, 1997.

Learning outcomes in a non-accredited curriculum: a view from the adult education sector[1]

John Vorhaus

1. Introduction

How should we record students' learning in a non-accredited curriculum? Although I make some suggestions in response to this question, I am principally concerned with *what it is* that we are seeking to record. For we cannot decide how best to record something if we have not clearly defined the nature of the phenomenon we wish to record in the first place.

I shall argue that insufficient attention is paid to the nature of the existing non-schedule 2 student cohort and to the purposes of adult education. If the promotion of students' learning is our primary goal we must be clear who we are catering for, and what our purpose is in so doing. Attention to these questions will show up the importance of recognising the numerous and varied types of learning outcomes. It will also imply formative rather than summative assessment as the preferred means of recording students' learning. Finally, we need to distinguish tiers of responsibility in the matter of recording learning, and my principal (though not exclusive) concern here is students and tutors rather than colleges, funders and research bodies.

In part 1, I look at the nature of the non-schedule 2 curriculum and student cohort, together with the features which characterise their learning outcomes. In part 2, I look at the means of gathering evidence of learning outcomes, including evidence of retention, attendance and progression, together with the assessment of students' learning.

PART ONE: IDENTIFYING LEARNING OUTCOMES

In part 1, I argue that it is necessary to keep in mind the distinguishing characteristics of the non-accredited curriculum and student cohort, and that non accredited learning outcomes are both more difficult to verify, and more numerous and varied than is commonly supposed.

2. Distinctive features of non-accredited learning

Before we turn attention to learning outcomes, we should first ask what exactly is distinctive of non-accredited adult education. Janssen has provided an illuminating list of characteristics that distinguish the existing non-schedule 2 curriculum from schedule 2[2], and her thoughts serve as a prompt for the material below.

i. Students

Some generalisations that apply to some groups emphatically do not apply to others, but the generalisations taken as a set are intended to characterise the non-schedule 2 cohort as a whole:

- Different and differing levels of ability and experience
- Voluntary attendance which is encouraged rather than required
- Lack of confidence in the ability to succeed in education
- Negative experience of formal education

- No or few formal qualifications
- Mental health problems
- Aim to enter or return to further or higher education
- Aim to secure (further) employment
- Positive experience of formal education
- Many formal qualifications, up to and beyond degree level study
- No intent to progress to either further education or employment
- Aim to pursue an interest for its own sake.

ii. Courses

In light of the above[3], the following characteristics apply to many non-schedule 2 courses:

- Negotiable learning objectives, which may vary between students within one group, and between one group and another
- Level of course difficulty/complexity to reflect mixed ability/experience of students
- Large number of short courses, including 'tasters' comprising a few hours only
- Typically no entry requirements
- Devised to suit a particular institution or group of students
- Not always repeated or designed to facilitate replication
- No national or externally verified syllabus.

iii. Teaching

In the light of 'Students' and 'Courses' above[4], tutors should be:

- In possession of a wide repertoire of learning styles
- Able to teach students with different and differing levels of ability and experience
- Able to adapt course content and learning style to suit the needs of students
- Able to provide substantial and detailed assessment of students' learning
- In possession of strong communication and interpersonal skills.

iv. Learning

In the light of 'Students', 'Courses' and 'Teaching' above[5], a non-schedule 2 learning environment should include:

- A positive learning experience: ability and experience is affirmed and fully exploited
- A constructive learning experience: knowledge, aptitude and skill deepens or is extended
- Absence of formal or externally imposed pressures to succeed
- Opportunities to fail, experiment, return and try again (and again)
- Provision for different and differing levels of experience and ability
- Support for special needs
- Opportunities for progression, development and maintaining equilibrium.[6]

It will be necessary to keep in mind the distinguishing characteristics of the non-schedule 2 curriculum and student cohort when examining the nature and types of learning outcomes.

3. Learning outcomes[7]

i. Introduction

The nature of learning outcomes is frequently misunderstood, in more than one sense. Learning outcomes are:

(a) More difficult to verify than commonly supposed
(b) More numerous and varied than commonly supposed.

As a result of (a), colleges are facing unrealistic goals, namely:

(c) to verify outcomes that it is practically impossible to verify
(d) to meet inappropriately exacting standards of verification.

As a result of (b) current policy tends to:

(e) Over-emphasise the extrinsic benefits of learning
(f) Under-emphasise (and misunderstand) the intrinsic benefits of learning.

Upshot: the learning landscape is described in terms and categories that tend to neglect part of the essential purpose that adult education in particular should foster.

ii. What is a learning outcome?

FEDA acknowledges that this is an important and difficult question[8], something which becomes apparent when we consider borderline cases. Which of the following are learning outcomes?

- A student attending an over-60's club boosts her self-esteem as a result of making new friends.
- A student attending a course on confidence building, and designed to promote fraternity, boosts her confidence as a result of making new friends.
- A student attending a course on meditation finds greater peace of mind.
- A student on a philosophy course takes up her tutor's view that analytical philosophy is a bankrupt tradition. The student, when asked to explain this view, cannot begin to provide an adequate defence.
- A student completing a Yoga course has greater physical stamina than before.
- A student has been attending the same 'debating' group for five years, and although the set of topics remains the same, he enjoys a good argument and hearing other people's opinions.

FEDA rightly draws attention to the anxiety and confusion stemming from the variable use of 'outcomes' by different stakeholders.[9] The outcomes we are interested in are those tied up in relevant ways to teaching, and with the nature of a course or class of which this is a part. The question then is: what are the relevant ways in which teaching is tied up with learning outcomes?

iii. A causal connection between teaching and learning

One way in which teaching and learning are connected is as follows: it is a necessary condition of a learning outcome that it is causally related to a period of teaching, or a specified period of education. If there is no causal relation between X and Y, how can we say that Y is an outcome of X? This is obvious but the implications are not always properly appreciated. Causal links are frequently hard to establish, as in the case where the outcome is not closely proximate to the teaching, or where learning does not readily lend itself to quantifiable confirmation. Many claims about learning outcomes run far in advance of what it is possible for a tutor or institution to confirm: what is the status of these unconfirmed or unconfirmable outcomes? More generally, what are the standards of verification required to confirm

(a) That learning has taken place, and
(b) That the learning is causally connected to some period of teaching or education?

iv. Additional outcomes

Not all outcomes of learning are learning outcomes.[10] In other words, some outcomes are made possible as a result of one or more courses, but are not themselves the products of these courses. We can call these 'additional outcomes' (additional, that is, to learning outcomes.) An example: suppose I am appointed as a full-time lecturer as a result of gaining a Ph.D. My appointment would not have been possible without the qualification, but the appointment is not itself a learning outcome. Additional outcomes may take the form of economic benefits (e.g. improved employment prospects), social

benefits (e.g. greater social cohesion) and personal benefits (e.g. improved self-esteem).

Recognition of additional outcomes allows us to place in context the following remarks from a college principal, quoted by Lavender:

This must be the paramount indicator of success for an educational institution – are people in jobs, earning more money, off welfare, living independently? Yet because it is expensive and difficult to collect, the information ... is generally worthless.[11]

The principal is citing examples of extrinsic economic, social and personal goods. These are certainly important benefits of education, and the principal is right to draw attention to these. But are they *learning* outcomes? The answer will depend upon how much there is in common between a new job and what was learned previously at college. We should not confuse what a course serves as a platform for (a first publishing contract, for example), with what students learn on their courses (such as the experience and knowledge gained from completing the first chapter of a first novel). A tendency to see learning largely in terms of its extrinsic social and economic goods leads to neglect of outcomes that are specific to the learning process; outcomes such as a growing confidence to learn which adult education in particular seeks to encourage.

v. Intrinsic goods

Intrinsic goods are a feature of all education, but there are two reasons for discussing them here:

- There is general misunderstanding of their nature and value
- The intrinsic value of education is specially important to many non-schedule 2 students.

Intrinsic goods are good in themselves, rather than in virtue of any additional benefits. An example of an intrinsic good in education is the pleasure derived from learning. The extrinsic goods of education are its beneficial effects, including extrinsic social goods (e.g. participation in community life); extrinsic economic goods (eg. a more highly qualified workforce) and extrinsic personal goods (eg. making new friends).

The intrinsic value of education is often either neglected or subsumed under its extrinsic aspects. In *Learning works*, for example, we read:

Justice and equity must also have their claim upon the arguments for educational growth. In a social landscape where there is a growing gulf between those who have and those who have not, the importance of social cohesion cannot be ignored.[12]

Here, justice and social cohesion are put forward as reasons for education. These are important, but they are not the same as learning for its own sake, since they are goals which learning and education are able to promote. Individual and societal goods are unquestionably linked to the value of education, but the value of education is not wholly to be understood in terms of such extrinsic goals as these.

Why is it important to articulate the nature of intrinsic goods in adult education in particular? There are several reasons: for many students, it is specially important to have experience of the pleasure and fulfilment to be derived from learning. This factor is important viewed in the light of their negative past experience, and, perhaps, a surviving negative self-image. For many other students – those who have enjoyed the benefits of extensive education, or who have reached old age – acquisition of the extrinsic goods of further education or employment forms no part, or no large part of their purpose; for them, the pleasure of learning and taking part in educational activity with others is their largest reward.

vi A bias in favour of the easily identifiable

If there is a premium upon identifying and confirming outcomes, there is a danger of skewing the range of acknowledged outcomes in favour of the easily identifiable and easily confirmed criteria.

Tracking hard-to-identify outcomes is labour intensive and is not always an efficient use of resources – two reasons why an institution or tutor may be disinclined to follow them up. But the fact that an outcome may be hard to identify or confirm is no reason to regard it as any less valuable than outcomes that are easier to reach.

vii. Cumulative outcomes

Some learning is the product of many more courses than one. This consideration is pertinent in the case of a curriculum which includes very short courses, and in the case of those students who frequently enrol on a number of different (though often related) courses over many months and years. It is undeniable that their educational development will be partly a product of that experience, considered as a whole, as distinct from the various outcomes stemming from each of the distinct courses attended. But an atomistic picture, whose focus is upon a particular course and its outcomes, will completely fail to pick up developments of this nature.

viii. Learning as a long-term development

It is idle to pretend that all learning can be encapsulated by means of identifying outcomes during and at the end of specified courses. Much learning is a gradual and extended development, whose genesis may be evening courses at a local adult education centre and whose maturation culminates long after a student frequents adult education institutions. Understanding of material first acquired on a course may subsequently develop upon further reflection and more education; and similarly, an appreciation of the value of learning may continue long after the completion of a course. It is of primary importance that we adequately acknowledge learning of this type; and in so far as this is possible (a qualification not to be under-estimated) it is a research priority that we devise means of tracking, categorising and valuing learning of this nature.

ix. Unpredictability

Some learning developments are unpredictable, and whilst these may be recorded before the completion of a course, they cannot be recorded if they take place once a course has finished. For example, a student taking a class in Russian literature may discover philosophy through Dostoevsky, an interest pursued at a later stage, and though neither intended nor predictable, this is a learning outcome if it stands in a suitable causal relation to the teaching.

x. Not all outcomes match objectives

Though directly related to teaching, some learning may not be – and in some cases could not be – any part of the tutors' explicit aims and objectives. Students may learn to imitate what they admire in their tutor, and though related to the teaching, what is admired is no part of the tutor's stated agenda. This applies particularly to a tutor's dispositions: for example, a seriousness displayed in her extensive knowledge and learning, or the vigour with which she is concerned to get to the bottom of a problem, or the fluency with which she expresses herself: these are all traits which students may come to admire, attempt to imitate and learn from, and as such are valuable features of students' learning.

xi. Learning outcomes and understanding learning

Lavender quotes the following reason for identifying learning outcomes:

The wish to encourage greater understanding of learning on the part of tutors and students; to assess students' learning and to identify outcomes sensitive to their needs.[13]

I don't doubt the value of understanding learning on the part of tutors and students, but we should critically examine how much the identification of learning outcomes will contribute to our knowledge. Students often do not know in advance what will prove to be most (or least) appealing or useful. This is especially likely in the early stages of learning, as is commonly the case with non-schedule 2 students.

Nor does this point apply to education only. In many areas of life we often need extensive experience of something (love, work, etc.) *before* we can engage in the sophisticated activity of identifying our needs and wants in that area. This should make us suspicious of the view that students learn best only *after* they have defined their learning needs and objectives. What this implies is that there is a limit to the extent to which we should expect students correctly to identify their learning needs; and there is therefore a limit to the extent to which students' understanding of their learning will contribute to the furtherance of their education.

PART TWO: EVIDENCE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

In part 2, I argue that evidence of retention and attendance is largely irrelevant as evidence of learning; that whilst evidence of 'progression' provides evidence of learning, we need to recognise three quite different ways in which students pursue their adult education; that the appropriate standard of evidence of learning is better described as 'detailed' and 'individual' rather than 'robust' and 'rigorous'; that a primary means of recording learning is by means of assessing students, and that, in the context of a non-schedule 2 curriculum, there are reasons to prefer formative rather than summative assessment.

4. Retention and attendance

i. Evidence about retention and attendance is of primary importance to managers and funders. As Lavender notes[14], it is relatively easy to get hold of, it provides evidence of student satisfaction and motivation, and, in the case of bad figures, provides the prompt for an immediate enquiry into the quality of teaching and learning.

ii. The key point to bear in mind here is that we are concerned with the connection between retention and attendance on the one hand, and learning outcomes on the other. In cases of voluntary attendance, good retention/attendance figures provide evidence of general student satisfaction/motivation, and bad figures provide prima-facie evidence of general dissatisfaction/de-motivation. And that is as much as we are entitled to conclude. A manager will regard good figures as an indication (only) that the tutor is performing well, and that the students are happy with their course, but it would be quite improper to reach conclusions about their learning. From the continuing popularity of a tutor, or even a course, we cannot deduce that the students are learning a great deal. They may be, but that is something requiring independent evidence, typically to be drawn from some form of student assessment. Neither 'retention' nor 'attendance' is to be regarded as equivalent to 'learning'; nor do the former provide direct evidence of the latter.

iii Bad retention/attendance figures, on the other hand, are plainly cause for concern, about the tutor, course and students' learning. But even here, one has to tread carefully. Those students who continue to attend may be learning more on a poorly attended course than those students attending a more popular option.

iv. We should not conclude to a favourable assessment of learning from evidence of good retention/attendance; and we should even be wary before concluding to an unfavourable assessment of learning from poor figures for retention and attendance. The general point is that evidence of retention and attendance is marginal, prima-facie evidence of learning at best, and wholly irrelevant
at worst.

5. Progression

i. Unlike retention and attendance, information about students' progression can provide direct evidence of their learning. But at the same time, we need to take care noticing the different senses in which it is possible for students positively to engage in learning, not all of which are best thought of as instances of 'progression'. 'Progress' implies forward movement from one point on a scale towards

another point on the same scale. It is often observed that there are many other ways in which students engage in worthwhile learning, and indeed there are, but nothing is gained by forcing these alternatives into the category of 'progression'. They deserve categories to themselves. Hence, we should distinguish:

(a) Progression, in the sense of moving forwards along one dimension.
(b) Development, in the sense of moving forwards along at least two, and not necessarily related, dimensions.
(c) Equilibrium, in the sense of working actively to stay at the same level of accomplishment or competence.[15]

ii. The distinctions drawn above serve several purposes. First and foremost, perhaps, they enable us to keep clearly in view some of the valuable aspects of adult education, which are otherwise often lost within the category of extrinsic economic and social benefits. Consider 'equilibrium' for example. One important cohort in adult education comprises older students and those who are permanently retired. It is frequently the case that for many of these students, their education is a source of maintaining well-being. They may wish to make progress in each of the several (and often unrelated) activities they pursue; but it is not participation and progress in any one class that is the main concern, but regular attendance in a range of activities which together continue to exercise and keep mind and body healthy.

iii. Another important category identified is that group of students whose learning takes the form of development, rather than straightforward progression; that is, students who are moving forwards either along more than one unrelated dimension at the same time, or who decide to move onto courses largely unrelated to previous study. Hayes emphasises that many adult students possess low confidence and self-esteem, and whose first step in adult education is to choose a course that builds on existing knowledge or skill, before later – and only perhaps much later – choosing a more demanding and accredited course which may bear little relation to previous choices.16 Students with low self-esteem, or who possess little confidence to succeed in education, or who are starting out again in education, will often seek to experiment with more than one educational option. There is no reason to think that their educational development will take the form of linear progression. If we are to do justice to adult learning, its patterns and tendencies, then our record must be sensitive to those many adults whose start is faltering, apparently desultory, interrupted with enforced absence, leading later in directions unanticipated at the beginning, and somewhat removed from the point of departure.

6. Outcomes and assessment: the standard of evidence

i. The evidence of student learning that it is appropriate to require, and the standards it is appropriate to apply to that evidence, must be sensitive to the nature of the organisation required to produce it and the reasons for its production. The brief remarks that follow express views about the standards of evidence appropriate to tutors and their college of adult education.[17] They are also written with a view to the form of assessment that is most appropriate to the non-schedule 2 cohort, formative assessment, the subject of a later section of this paper.

Lavender notes three pragmatic reasons for identifying learning outcomes, one of which I discussed previously[18] and the remaining two I comment on below.

ii. *The need to show that programmes without accreditation can be just as rigorously evaluated in terms of students' achievements as those which are accredited.*[19]

This implies that the right and proper standard to be aimed at should be, without exception, 'rigorous' evaluation, but this is open to question. Rigorous evaluation is labour and resource intensive and the investment necessary for the desired evaluation is difficult to justify for courses which are often (a) very short, and, more importantly (b) either unusual or even unique. (b) makes it more difficult to provide a standard or replicable system of recording student learning, and in these cases it is asking a lot to meet exacting standards for assessing outcomes.

There is in any case a more general question about whether it is reasonable to expect that programmes without accreditation should be rigorously evaluated. I believe that for providers (as

distinct from research institutions), the answer is that it is not, chiefly in virtue of the difficulties in the way of verifying many of the outcomes common and important in non-schedule 2 learning (as set out in section 3).

iii. *The need to produce robust evidence of student achievement over time as a means of underpinning quality assurance systems and to show evidence to funders and inspectors.*[20]

Insofar as the meaning of 'robust' is understood as equivalent to the meaning of 'rigorous' the remarks in section (ii) also apply in this section. But a few additional comments are in order.

'Robust' standardly implies a case that is made out in great detail, with each conclusion itself in receipt of adequate evidence and argument. But judgements are often insightful, perceptive and useful, though the judge is unable to provide adequate evidence for the judgement. Many first class tutors provide insightful and constructive feedback to students about their learning, and are yet unable to provide an account of how they do this. You do not have to know how you arrived at your judgements and observations in order to provide an insightful and constructive assessment of students' learning. And it by no means follows from the fact that a tutor has insight into what it is important to learn that she is able to articulate this in the form of a stateable learning outcome. Nor is it obvious that this is necessary, either for her or for the student, as a means of identifying and assessing learning. What is most important is that the student should be enabled to learn. For this purpose, a tutor who is able to hint, nurture and correct by example may provide all that the student could wish for. The tutor's relative inability to articulate the desired learning in the form of stated outcomes may be a disadvantage only to the assessing body.

iv. It is sometimes supposed that evidence of learning outcomes must always take the form of quantifiable evidence, or evidence that lends itself to quantification and aggregation. But the supposition is false. Oral and written testimony from students and tutors may provide the most appropriate and reliable evidence of students' learning, certainly if it is thorough and well thought of. At the same time, the more an assessment is tailored to suit the needs of a particular student or student group, the more difficult it will be to translate the findings into quantifiable or aggregated data.

There is a connected point: whether or not measurement is always an option – not all forms of measurement are valuable as a means of assessment. For example, even if it is possible to quantify the confidence a chronically shy student has acquired after six 2-hour classes it is likely to be less valuable as a piece of information than a series of well chosen comparative judgements about the students' progress over the previous 12 hours. Whether or not measurement is valuable, it is not always practicable, since the information sought will not justify the resources required to acquire it.

There is here a conflict of interest: between, on the one hand, the needs of students and tutors to give or receive individual/meaningful assessment; and, on the other hand, the needs of funders and policymakers for quantifiable data congenial to their purposes. This is a broad and difficult subject which I cannot discuss here, save to note a current tendency in policy to accommodate the preferences of funders and managers to a point that is now detrimental to the interests of students and tutors.

v. I do not mean to imply that it is unimportant to acknowledge and record students' learning. On the contrary: in the section 'Assessing learning: in favour of formative assessment', where I argue that the primary means of recording learning is formative student assessment, we shall see that by these means we can indeed acquire impressive evidence of learning outcomes. But at the same time, the evidence from formative assessment conforms to standards of evidence it is appropriate and realistic to expect of students and tutors.

7. Assessing learning: in favour of formative assessment

i. An important – perhaps the most important – opportunity for tutors to collect evidence of learning outcomes is at the point when they assess students. I shall argue that formative rather than summative assessment is to be preferred as the means of recording student learning, and that the evidence collected is better described as 'detailed' and 'individual' rather than 'robust' and 'rigorous'.

ii Many students in adult education have had experience of disappointment, frustration and failure at school, and are looking to find a more positive educational experience in adult education. One of the attractions of the non-schedule 2 curriculum is that it provides a door that is open to anyone, and allows students to go at their own pace without fear of a being judged a failure. Furthermore, many students are in need of support and guidance; they want to be judged less than they want to be informed or advised about the standard of their work and where they need to go next. Providers should therefore go out of their way to support and nurture these students, offering a learning environment that is neither daunting nor pressurised, and which is tolerant of failure, experimentation, and inhibition. Formative assessment is congenial to these purposes, since its perspective is future-regarding, and should include thorough and insightful commentary on progress to date and how in the light of this the student might improve. Summative assessment is less suitable: since assessment which takes the form of a global retrospective judgement or grade is for many students a forbidding prospect, and inimical to the encouraging atmosphere adult education can excel in providing.

iii For students at the start of their educational career, or who are venturing to return, or whose confidence is low or fragile, there is a great deal to be said for providing a learning environment which permits exploration and the making of mistakes. This does not imply a policy of anything goes, for students will learn most by trial and error if they are in the company of a knowledgeable tutor, whose course has a clear structure, and who is able at the same time to adapt the course content and learning styles to suit the (unanticipated) needs of the class. What is implied is that students should be encouraged to make the most of their course, whether by participation in class discussion, speaking up during vocal exercises, exploring their creativity, or attempting written assignments and exercises. One important source of encouragement is a tutor who offers insightful comments, and whose aim is forward looking in the sense of seeking to make a positive contribution to the student's future learning. Such encouragement is most likely to emphasise advice and guidance rather than (or at least, as well as) retrospective judgement.

iv. Many students in adult education have no desire or need to progress anywhere, at least in the sense of taking a further course or finding a new job. Their personal lives may be in need of enrichment, and the pleasure they get from a class in poetry appreciation or flower arranging may be just and as much as they are looking for. Nor are their lives necessarily impoverished; it may be that, having found success at work and home, a student wishes to branch out, pursuing a latent interest in, say, photography. She doesn't want to become an expert or a full-time student in the subject, and an introductory non-schedule 2 course may be all that she needs before pursuing her interest without instruction. Again, for students like these, what is most sought after is a productive and congenial learning environment, which assists their development by means of knowledgeable teaching and insightful feedback. In these cases, retrospective judgements and grades are an irrelevance at best, and unwanted intrusion at worst.

v. One of the distinguishing characteristics of the non-schedule 2 curriculum is that courses and their objectives should be sensitive to students' needs, and neither the student profile, nor students' needs can be altogether anticipated in advance. This has implications for the form of assessment that is best suited to recording student learning, a fact recognised by both Lavender and the FEFC:

The FEFC's current inspection research work on 'value added' includes the question of what 'value added' means when there are no qualifications appropriate, as in the case of provision for students with learning difficulties. With the ideal curriculum for such students being an individual one, individual learning outcomes need to be set against the original individual assessment. But how then can targets

be set that are about the whole cohort when the assessment, the curriculum and the achievements are entirely individual.[21]

It is a priority that non-schedule 2 teaching and learning should find room for a multiplicity of students' needs and aspirations. This does not mesh readily with summative assessment, which of its nature presupposes general standards or benchmarks against which we judge students' overall progress or performance. But there is no such presupposition in the case of formative assessment, which does not entail standardised grades or marks, and which, on the contrary, is most effective when it takes the form of detailed and insightful commentary about the performance of each individual student.

8. Conclusions

My primary claims are as follows:

1. When devising methods for recording learning, it is necessary to keep in mind the distinguishing characteristics of the non-schedule 2 curriculum and student cohort.

2. Some of the most important distinguishing characteristics of the non-schedule 2 student cohort are: low levels of confidence and self esteem; negative experience of formal education; classes comprising students of mixed ability/experience; voluntary attendance; wide range of future aims and ambitions.

3. Many non-schedule 2 learning outcomes are difficult to verify; and they are more numerous and varied than is commonly supposed.

4. Colleges (and funders) should devise means of recording students' learning which are sensitive to the numerous and varied paths and purposes that the students are pursuing.

5. We should replace the single category of 'Progression' with the three-fold categorisation – 'Progression', 'Development', 'Equilibrium' – so as to acknowledge the importantly different ways in which students pursue adult education.

6. Evidence of retention and attendance is largely irrelevant as evidence of learning.

7. The appropriate standard of evidence of students' learning is better described as 'detailed' and 'individual' rather than 'robust' and rigorous'.

8. A primary means for tutors and colleges gathering evidence of learning outcomes is student assessment; this should be formative rather than summative.

Postscript

I recognise that some of these conclusions will be unwelcome to funding bodies and policy makers, who naturally and rightly seek efficient means of exploiting quantifiable data and evidence. There are differing and legitimate perspectives on the questions discussed in this paper, depending upon the vantage point of the various players. I have adopted a partial view, in so far as I have been almost exclusively concerned with the interests of students and tutors. But whilst acknowledging the plurality of competing interests, we are entitled to press the central question: what are we seeking to use and exploit our evidence of learning *for*? If we desire to make the most of adult education, and in particular its potential to recruit and retain those who might otherwise stay away from education, we should keep uppermost in our minds those methods of recording learning that are most congenial to the needs of students, tutors and the learning process.

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[1] As distinct from the further education sector. This article was prompted by Peter Lavender's paper: Lavender, P. *Learning outcomes: towards a synthesis of progress*, from which I learned a great deal. My subject is learning outcomes in a non-accredited curriculum, which is currently – though not for much longer – understood as falling under the category of non-schedule 2.

[2] Janssen O. *A review of tutors' course reports*. A report for the Mary Ward Centre, Session 1998/99, appendix 1.

[3] And for other reasons not relevant here.

[4] As above.

[5] See note 3.

[6] See the section entitled 'Progression'.

[7] Section 3 includes (and expands upon) material contained in: Vorhaus J. *Objectives, outcomes and non-accredited courses: an agenda for FEDA*, 1998.

[8] See *A sense of achievement: outcomes of adult learning*. FEDA, 1997.

[9] *ibid.*

[10] Hayes suggests a distinction between a 'learning outcome' and 'an outcome of learning' (Hayes A, *'Standards' and the measurement of the learning outcomes of adult students in further education*. FEDA Educational Research Network Conference, 1999, p6 and p13) but it is specified in terms quite different to those suggested here. I do not mean to imply that hers is not also a distinction worth drawing: Hayes' paper includes a searching enquiry into many of the issues discussed in this paper, and contains a number of recommendations that I would endorse.

[11] Lavender, P., *op. cit.*, p3.

[12] *Learning works*, Further Education Funding Council, p6.

[13] Lavender, P., *op. cit.*, p1.

[14] Lavender, P., *op.cit.*, p2.

[15] A departure from the standard meaning, but 'equilibrium' is more attractive as a title than 'maintenance' - the more accurate alternative. Olga Janssen has pointed out that for many older students, participation in adult education serves to retard mental and physical decline. In these cases, students manage not just to maintain equilibrium but to ameliorate the rate of descent. This point becomes increasingly pertinent to a population that includes a growing proportion of older people, and perhaps deserves a category to itself. But is there a title for a case of this kind that is both succinct and not insulting?

[16] Hayes, A., *op.cit.*, pp3-4.

[17] It seems to me that many of Lavender's recommendations are best implemented by a body such as FEDA or the LSC; for they amount to a large and complex research project requiring labour and expertise to be found only within a research establishment.

[18] Section 3, point *(xi)*.

[19] Lavender P., *op. cit.*, p1.

[20] *ibid.*

[21] Lavender P., *op. cit.*, p5.

'Standards' and the measurement of the learning outcomes of adult students in further education

Amanda Hayes, Kensington and Chelsea College

(see college profile below)

In the past there has been some complacency about standards. The expectations placed on colleges and providers of work-based training have been too low. But the Government has now taken steps to promote excellence and to secure radical improvements where standards are unacceptably poor.

Quality is at the heart of our new proposals. The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) will have a formal role to promote high standards, and will be expected to fund only learning that meets adequate standards.

Tessa Blackstone, Minister of State for Education in the House of Lords (in FEDA, *Inform* p5, Issue 3, 1999)

The changing environment for adult learning

From April 2001 Local Education Authorities (LEAs), private and voluntary sector education and training providers and Further Education (FE) colleges will operate within a single funding and quality framework. The dominant players in the new Learning and Skills Councils will be drawn from Training and Enterprise Councils, (TECs) and the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The politically powerful local LSCs, with access to discretionary funds, will inevitably use quality criteria to make decisions, as highlighted by the Minister of State. Their concerns will relate to academic standards, A-levels and the development of vocational skills. Data that is linked to funding is likely to be required at an organisational level, as well as at an individual student level.

Those organisations formerly involved with non-accredited provision which fell outside schedule 2 of the 1992 FHE Act will be under considerable pressure to measure learning and record student outcomes, in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of the provision. Public funding of their programmes will be dependent on their ability to meet criteria and standards set by the LSC. Initially, this may be identified as an issue for designated colleges, residential adult colleges, the Workers' Education Association (WEA) and local education authorities. However, the opportunity to debate and re-interpret what constitutes a learning outcome for the purposes of standard setting and funding is important to all involved in further and community education.

In this paper I will briefly describe recent developments in the education of adults as a context for understanding current policy. I will then identify some of the key issues for managers and staff that will need to be tackled if some of the more intangible learning outcomes – linked to the Government's vision of a Learning Society – are not to be under-valued and therefore be a low priority for public funding.

College profile:

Kensington and Chelsea College has 17,500 adult students, 75% of whom are women. We have a substantial FEFC funded programme but also provide adult learning under contract to the local authority – Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. KCC provides classes for an ethnically diverse population – 100 languages are spoken in the local community. The FEFC has identified the College as one of a group that recruits a high proportion of students from disadvantaged areas. We provide

classes in partnership with the voluntary sector and private trainers. Many students use informal learning as the first step and the issue of measuring their learning has been a long, on-going discussion. The college is inspected by FEFC, but also by the LEA who use consultants and the Ofsted framework for adult education, to judge the standard of provision. As college nominee I have therefore had responsibility for ensuring that student progress is demonstrated.

Government policy and the lifelong learning agenda

The FE sector has been undergone radical transformation during recent years. The changes being driven by government policy initiatives, in particular the 1988 Education Reform Act and 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, have shifted powers from Local Education Authorities to school and college governors and resulted in the creation of local education markets.

As a result of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act, an increasing number of adults have participated in publicly funded, post-compulsory education. Government policy statements set out by the Conservatives in Lifetime learning (DfEE, 1995) and by Labour in The learning age (DfEE, 1998) have had a high public profile. There has been a broad consensus between both Conservative and Labour Governments about what the priorities for post-compulsory education should be (Whitty, 1998). Policy has focused on three key priorities: firstly, a need to develop industrial training to increase Britain's skill base in order to develop the nation's economic competitive strength. Secondly, a need to widen participation in education by people who have few, or no formal qualifications, in order to get them into employment and not dependent on welfare payments. Thirdly, the need to find strategies which encourage social inclusion and reduce crime. Colleges and other providers of education and training for adults have been under continuous pressure from government to respond to these priorities, and at the same time to set high educational standards and raise levels of student retention and achievement.

The Labour Government described its own role as creating:

a framework of opportunities for people to learn and to lift barriers that prevent them from taking up those opportunities. (DfEE, 1998:13).

This paper highlights some concerns about the apparent gaps between learning that governments have identified as important and the learning outcomes that have been, and may be, fundable through the public purse. Policy documents have described the role of education in creating an inclusive society in which learning in its widest sense played a central part:

Lifetime learning is not just about the economy and competitiveness. It is also crucial to our national culture and quality of life. For older people in particular, participation in education and training represents a major way in which they can contribute to the life of the community. (DfEE, 1995: Foreword by Conservative Secretaries of State for Education and Employment, Scotland and Wales – Gillian Shephard, Michael Forsyth and William Hague)

Our vision of the Learning Age is about more than employment. The development of a culture of learning will help build a united society, assist in the creation of personal independence and encourage our creativity and innovation. (Labour – DfEE, 1998:10)

However, despite the rhetoric of 'choice' and a stated belief in the wider social value of education, it has been the needs of industry and short-term vocational goals that have been at the centre of policy developments and which have been identified to receive funding.

Projected changes in the structure of post-compulsory education give practitioners the opportunity to debate what constitutes a learning outcome and highlight the important contribution that 'softer' outcomes make towards the achievement of government priorities.

The 1992 FHE Act and division of adult learning into vocational and leisure courses

The 1992 Further and Higher Education Act was a key move to promote the progression of government policy and market values in the public sector – competition, efficiency and value for money together with the rhetoric of 'choice' and raising standards.

The Act had a major impact on opportunities for adult learners. Adult learners were recognised as a section of the community with a statutory right to receive publicly funded education, but this did not cover the full range of learning in which adults might wish to participate. The distinction between what type of education could be funded by the Government and what was to be made available (to an unspecified level) by local authorities, was clearly defined (HMSO, 1991). What emerged in the Act was a separation of what was described as 'vocational' and 'leisure' provision. Vocational courses could be provided by FE colleges, adult education institutes or the voluntary sector, but would need to conform to the particular requirements defined in schedule 2 of the Act in order to receive funding from the FEFCs.[1] Provision eligible for funding included: courses leading to accreditation via NVQs, GCSEs, GCE AS and A-levels; courses giving access to higher level courses in further education and higher education; adult literacy and basic skills (ABE) English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) and some courses for students with learning difficulties and disabilities (SLDD). Other provision, such as community history groups or non-accredited courses in languages and the visual and performing arts which, it was argued during the passing of the Bill, were more to do with notions of leisure and personal development than vocation, were to be the responsibility of Local Authorities to fund. The stage was therefore set for educational provision for adults to be split into 'vocational' and 'leisure' courses with little reference to the fact that adults themselves did not necessarily make or wish to have these separations. As the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) pointed out:

Every major study confirms that student purpose cannot be predicted by the title or ostensible purpose of a course. (NIACE, 1991)

NIACE (1991) commented that some established businesses such as Ford, Lucas and Rover had recognised this through the provision of their employee education schemes.[2] If Government was trying to provide a better trained workforce for industry, industry had already moved towards a broader definition of what kind of learning activities benefited their employees and their business.

NIACE also pointed out that a characteristic of adult learning is that students' intentions change as a result of their involvement in the learning process, and that to separate out programmes of learning into vocational and leisure was unhelpful and lacked foresight. The separation failed to recognise that people returning to study, who may be lacking in self-confidence, often prefer to start with a course that builds on skills and interests that they already have, and do not want the pressure of coursework and examinations. They may, however, make use of the opportunities to progress to accredited courses and more advanced programmes over time. There can be no time limit on how long this process may take. People with difficulties and family pressures may need several years of part-time study to reach the point when they have the confidence and the skills to move on. So whilst the new status of some adult programmes was welcomed by practitioners, there were other aspects which gave cause for concern.

Post-incorporation growth and concerns about who participates in education

As a result of changes in economic patterns and educational reform during the last 15 years, adult learners have been presented with new opportunities and constraints. The student body in both higher and further education has changed considerably and there are now greater numbers of adult students studying on award-bearing courses (McGivney, 1996). Government pressure on higher and further education institutions to expand, has resulted in mature students being identified as a new market sector through which growth targets can be met. Consequently, there has been a new flexibility in entry requirements, course structure, modes of attendance and methods of assessment.[3] McGivney (1996:3) notes that in 1994, approximately 80% of universities and colleges had developed, or were committed to developing modular arrangements. Davies (1995) estimates that there were approximately 13,000 Access entrants to higher education in 1993.

The increased availability of places in further education and the greater flexibility of the educational offer, coinciding with the dramatic reduction of Local Authority educational provision for adults, has

contributed to a significant growth in the proportion of adult students (usually defined as people over 19 years old, DfEE statistical returns) as opposed to the traditional 16–19 year old cohort. The Further Education Funding Council (FEFC, 1995) Chief Inspector's report for 1994–95 indicated that approximately three-quarters of students in the sector were now adults. More mature women than ever before, including a higher proportion from ethnic minority groups, are now progressing to higher education (McGivney, 1996:7).

Following Incorporation in 1993, statistics showed a year-on-year increase in general participation rates, but revealed that some social groups were under-represented. The Kennedy Committee suggested that the separation of the different strands of adult education had weakened progression routes for the very people that the government was saying it wanted to encourage back to study, or perhaps more precisely back to work (FEFC, 1997). Kennedy made clear recommendations to the FEFC on how its strategies, including the funding methodology, could be developed to widen participation, how good practice could be shared and how the effect of its strategies might be monitored and evaluated. The 'widening participation' agenda has resulted in some increased, targeted funding for further education to help colleges better meet individual learning needs. However, I believe that structures and discourses remain which limit access to educational opportunities. Furthermore, the current focus on qualifications-based learning for funding purposes disproportionately disadvantages some sections of the community.

What counts as learning to be eligible for public funding?

I suggest that the type of learning that has traditionally been 'measured' formally and 'recognised' through qualifications, is that valued by the dominant culture. Therefore, discussions about learning outcomes and the type of skills and knowledge that should be paid for with public money is really a debate what counts as knowledge and how this is controlled, rather than just how it is measured. This is familiar territory for many adult educators (Johnson, 1979). It raises important questions about whose culture and whose 'standards' are being privileged.

Many adult students make it clear that for them learning is about personal fulfilment and life chance. They see education as a way to gain linguistic, cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1985): gaining status through education, having more control over their lives, providing a better standard of living for their families, being a positive role model for their children and creating a culture of learning within their homes (Hayes, 1999). Qualifications are often part of this, but not the only learning outcome they desire.

The following extracts of a conversation with a white, working-class woman[4] clearly illustrate the way in which her experience of the traditional examination method of measuring learning in her initial education had resulted in feelings of failure. They also show that as an adult returning to education, she had identified gaining confidence as a key learning goal, rather than an 'unanticipated outcome'.

Before, when I was at school, I didn't have any exams or anything and I hated it. I had low confidence, very low confidence so I thought to myself I'd come to college and make myself feel better, I'd gain some mileage whatever. My partner used to say that I didn't know anything so it was the thing to prove him wrong.

I have a lot more confidence for the fact that I know a lot more and I'm learning so much in different areas. I feel like I can hold a conversation, an intellectual conversation about a certain topic. It makes you feel good that you can hold a conversation and know what you're speaking about, as before I had no qualifications and so I felt I wasn't worth anything. Now I feel I can help other people.

A number of learning outcomes can be identified here including: communication skills and working with others. This student is aware that learning has taken place. How can this 'value added' be presented to external observers?

Thus identifying what outcome an individual wants as a result of engaging in a learning project is not as simple as naming a qualification, such as NVQ hairdressing. The difficulty that some students have had with completing details of their 'primary learning goal' according to the FEFC definition, is perhaps revealing of a central problem: whilst the student may identify their 'PLG' as 'to get a job', 'to feel more self confident', what is actually required to trigger funding is a 'primary qualification aim'.

As argued earlier, what students want from education changes over time as a result of engagement in the learning process. Thus, it might be argued that when a student decides to change direction after starting a course, this is evidence that he or she has reflected on their experiences and that learning has taken place. This learning is particularly important for those who have little knowledge of the full range of opportunities available and a lack of confidence in their abilities to succeed in unfamiliar areas. As O'Rourke has identified:

When educational disadvantage is compounded by other material differences – of gender, ethnicity, poverty, class, disability and sexuality – the effect is often the denial of imagined possibility' (O'Rourke, 1995:111)

Surely learning what opportunities exist and gaining the confidence to access them is something that should be recognised as an achievement, but should this 'learning' be formally recognised? Probably not, and yet a real commitment to widening participation needs to ensure that people who have gained least from education provision in the past have their horizons extended, not limited, by an early decision and that their development in confidence and aspiration should be valued. Would it be helpful to make a distinction between a 'learning outcome', identified in the course syllabus and the 'outcome of learning' which might be unanticipated?

Should all learning be measured and should all learning be accreditable? Given the wide range of learning outcomes possible, are there already recognised schemes in place which could be used in conjunction with subject-based learning to measure and accredit a broader range of achievements, e.g. 'key skills' or management competencies?

The Kennedy Committee's interim report, Pathways to success, (FEFC, 1997) recognised the role that FE plays in relation to citizenship and personal development, as well as vocational training for employment.

The economic success of the country will depend upon maximising the potential of all. Drawing upon the talents of an educational elite, or even an educated majority, will not be enough. Social cohesion will only be achieved if the capacity of everyone to contribute to and benefit from the social, cultural and personal dimensions of their lives is developed through learning. (FEFC, 1997:4)

Yet what is being funded to date, is an ever increasingly narrow form of vocationalism, which has been pointed out by a number of professionals involved in adult learning, including Alan Tuckett, director of NIACE in his response to the Government consultation document on Lifetime Learning (TES, 8.12.1995, p23).

The evidence to Kennedy led her to state in her introduction to Pathways to success that further education:

'engaged people in their wider community, enabling them to have a better appreciation of what makes the world tick. It influenced learners' attitudes to the education of their own children' (FEFC, 1997:1)

Thus delivering the vision of a learning society set out by David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education and Employment in his foreword to The learning age (DfEE, 1998).

The importance of learning in its widest sense is recognised as central to the achievement of social cohesion and the development of learning cultures within families and the workplace. Nevertheless, I am concerned that these learning outcomes are often difficult to measure and have therefore not been a significant feature of formal validation systems. Some significant work on learning outcomes has been carried out, notably by FEDA (Foster, Howard and Reisenberger, 1997) and the WEA . It is crucially important that further development and lobbying of key opinion formers takes place now in order to influence the future funding of adult learning. For, although the separate strands of FEFC, LEA and TEC funded learning will be brought together under the new LSCs, discourses about what constitutes a valid learning outcome, fundable through the public purse, will persist and sustain cultural values and practices (Foucault, 1974 and 1977).

Equal opportunities and accreditation

Modern society has become obsessed with 'credentialism' and in a world where opportunities are not equal, qualifications offer a degree of 'transparency' in relation to progression to higher education and employment for people from less privileged groups. Qualifications also raise personal status, which is often an important issue for students who have had little educational success in the past (Hayes, 1999).

However, formal assessment and accreditation has also been criticised for its failure to value certain types of knowledge or take account of different learning styles. For example, it has been argued that the move towards formal assessment is often problematic in two important areas. Firstly, syllabuses set by examination boards may allow little room for student negotiation and fail to value knowledge acquired through living (Elliott, 1998). Secondly, modes of assessment are focused on individual achievement and fail to recognise the cooperative way many students, particularly women, prefer to learn.

Whilst there are a number of different social groups who find learning based on the current qualifications systems unattractive or problematic, in what follows I will explore some of the issues as they relate to women. The shared experience of the group, central to the philosophy of adult education and Women's Studies courses runs against the role of teacher as 'expert'. It is argued that this method of learning is devalued within an education system which privileges white, male values and interests (Spender, 1980; Coats, 1994). De Wolfe (1980) has argued that formal assessment is linked to an ethos of competitive individualism, and that grading can introduce competition and envy and is destructive to group work because it highlights failure, rather than confirms learning. Law (1998) has argued that accreditation can be a way of 'normalising' women and disciplining lecturers:

In marketplace economics, standardisation is what pays dividends, the mainstreaming of provision through the control of assessment is one way to standardise need, even to dictate it. Diversity as a concept cannot be matched to this model. (Law, 1998:62)

Law (1998) is concerned how far standardisation will allow for minority needs to be acknowledged and met. She believes that the intervention of assessment alters classroom practice and may lead to student stress and drop out, particularly in the case of students with little academic success in their past history.

Berry (1995) writing about stress and depression experienced by women students in university, suggests the individualistic culture of personal achievement which runs counter to a collegiate, cooperative, women-friendly, approach to teaching and learning leads to stress. Fraser (1995) suggests that educational models are worked around a male view which promotes hierarchies and competition and places more value in formally acquired knowledge than personal experience.

Undoubtedly, the demands of formal accredited learning geared towards demonstrating individual achievement, runs contrary to the collaborative learning style that many women prefer. The need for lecturers to cover a set syllabus within a limited time-frame (which has shrunk to optimise funding and reduce unit costs), makes it more difficult for lecturers to develop group relationships, draw out students' previous experience and knowledge, and negotiate the curriculum with them. However, the shift towards more formal measurement and evaluation of learning has also had positive outcomes for students. In particular I suggest that regular, honest and supportive feedback, identified as important in student retention (McGivney, 1996; Martinez, 1997), has been strengthened by the recent focus on quality systems, inspection and the internal verification demands of accrediting bodies.

The push for accreditation of the curriculum has brought about significant changes in the content and style of learning. Has enough research been undertaken into the long-term effects of this?

Accountability for public funds and the 'standards' agenda

Not only are colleges being required to increase participation, but they are also expected to raise, or at least maintain educational standards. Since Incorporation central governments have exerted (via the FEFC) powerful control of colleges through the mechanism of inspection and performance indicators (Whitty, Power and Halpin, 1998). Colleges have been required to develop quality assurance systems to support continuous quality improvement and raise levels of student achievement. They have also had to set performance targets and monitor student recruitment, retention and achievement. Recently, actual performance based on the statistical data in the FEFC Individualised Student Record (ISR), has been made public through published reports and benchmarking data available on the FEFC web site. This, along with the annual publication of college reports on their performance against their strategic plan and charter commitments, examination results and surveys of the views of students and employers; together with quadrennial inspection reports, places colleges in the public eye. College managers have been under considerable pressure to improve quality according to external performance criteria, with the press ever ready to expose 'under-achieving' colleges and falling standards.

It is instructive to look briefly at some of the discussion in the press concerning educational standards, in order to gain a flavour of how public and high profile this matter has been. Improvements in examination results, particularly GCSE and A-level, has led to much debate about the maintenance of academic standards. Suggestions have been made that the examinations have become easier rather than that standards of achievement have risen (*Independent*, 14.8.97:6,13 and 13.8.97:1; *THES* 15.8.97:3; *Guardian* 14.8.97:9,13 and 13.8.97:1: *Economist* 16.8.97:26; *TES* 15.8.97:1,4; *Times* 14.8.97:1,9 and 15.8.97:31; *Financial Times* 14.8.97:8). Examination boards have been accused of placing too much emphasis on capturing a larger share of the market and too little on maintaining standards. The *Guardian*, (14.8.1996:3) reported: 'Ministers are considering a manifesto pledge to change the examination board system' one option being to amalgamate the four English boards to dispel fears of schools and colleges choosing boards they believe are most likely to give the highest results. Investigations by Ofsted and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority(QCA) into GCSE and A-level standards has resulted in claims by the advisers that the examinations are easier than they were twenty years ago and that students are given too much assistance in order to ensure pass rates (*Guardian*, 29.7.1996:6). Modular A-levels have been cited as the specific cause of the dilution in A-level standards (*Financial Times*, 15.8.1996:9).[5] Given the emphasis that the government has placed on league tables, it would not be surprising if colleges and schools opted for examination boards and modes of assessment which they believe would produce the most positive results.

Successive governments have intervened to rationalise the 'jungle of qualifications' (Hall, 1987) which had separately developed over time, were differently structured and did not interlock in any clear way. This has resulted in the development of the competence-based National Qualification framework. Here can be seen the attempt to insert the needs of business and industry, via the NCVQ employer Lead Bodies/Occupational Standards Councils, into the heart of the curriculum. More recently the Labour Government's action clearly signals a wish to control the proliferation of vocational qualifications and combat variable standards. A TES interview with Dr. Nick Tate, chief executive of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority reported that:

inadequate and duplicate qualifications will be hunted down and replaced with awards 'hallmarked' as nationally accepted standards (*TES*, 6.6.97:31).

There has been a fear that colleges' need for student achievement to trigger funding units may make the educational experience less rigorous. The ability to measure achievement has been attached to the development of higher standards, and thus inability to measure becomes linked with poor standards. There has been particular unease about college certificates, non-traditional forms of assessment and internal moderation. This is evident in the way that the FEFC recognition of courses eligible for funding has reduced over the years, with a demand for colleges to move to externally validated courses with agreed assessment procedures and quality mechanisms. Initially, schedule 2 courses included those that led to 'college certificates' as well as courses accredited by external validating bodies. The FEFC funding system has progressively moved from recognition of internal certificates and the funding of courses according to taught hours allocated by colleges, to recognition of individually-listed

qualifications acceptable to the FEFC, with a designated tariff. The FEFC estimated a shift of 20% in the number of enrolments on qualification courses between the academic years 1996/97 and 1997/8 (65% in 1996–97 to 85% in 1997–98) (FEFC, 1996). The rapid expansion of Open College Network qualification courses, devised by lecturers to meet the needs of specific groups of students is further evidence of this shift. The FEFC document, *How to apply for funding 1997–98*, clearly states that the funding rules are intended to stop courses which are perceived to be recreational rather than vocational being paid for by government funds (FEFC, 1996:34).

Whilst it must be recognised that some learning should be paid for by LEAs, individuals and employers, perhaps more careful consideration needs to be made of where the boundaries and drawn – particularly where non-traditional learners are concerned. I suggest that by labelling some less formal learning experiences as 'recreation' (and therefore low priority for public funding) important pathways may be lost which lead, over time to 're-creation'. The development of such pathways was a key recommendation in the Kennedy report (Kennedy, 1997) and has since been supported through Adult and Community Learning Funds.

Measuring the 'value added' by education

It is perhaps significant that the DFE briefing paper Value added in education (1995) reminds us that the concept of 'value added' was established in economics and:

is defined as the difference between the value of output of the production unit and the cost of raw materials and other goods and services used by the unit (DFE, 1995:5).

When aggregated the contributions form the Gross Domestic Product. The DFE recognised the technical complexity involved in measuring student attainment and of developing a statistical model capable of describing it.

It is therefore likely that DfEE through the LSCs will be looking for a method of measuring 'value added' not only at the individual student level, but also at the course and institutional level, in order to demonstrate the effectiveness of government education policies and justify funding levels to the Treasury. Any measures of learning outcomes will therefore need to be capable of aggregation as national data.

There are different models of recording individual student progression in non-accredited programmes in use at the present time. Even where an organisation such as the WEA has developed a system, there are concerns amongst practitioners about uneven practice across the country in terms of conceptual consistency, as well as rigour in the application of the model.[6]

Questions remain about how to validate 'episodes' of learning and learning which builds over time (Vorhaus, 1998). The FEFC funding methodology, and most college systems which have been set up to supply data to funders, cannot cope with 'flexibility'.[7] Tracking student attendance through these systems is a nightmare. As a result, a large proportion of students who leave because of personal or family sickness or pregnancy, or who transfer to other colleges because of residential moves, are logged as drop-outs. The funding mechanism penalises colleges (financially and in terms of statistical outputs) if students leave courses early to take up employment – the stated government objective.[8] Thus, whilst the 'flexible curriculum' has appeared to be the goal for colleges (Robertson, 1994), in reality the funding methods still support a traditional 'full-time' learning model and penalise colleges when students interrupt learning, take longer than expected to complete their studies,[9] or want to transfer to a different course or institution. We should be concerned that the lack of a national credit accumulation system[10] means that students who dip in and out of education, because of external factors, are unlikely to gain formal credit for their learning achievements. Another area for concern is that the lack of a funding mechanism capable of supporting a national credit accumulation system means that colleges have a limited incentive to develop more flexible 'student-friendly' provision. 'Intention to return' in FEFC terms only refers to the discrete programme the student is enrolled on, not to a restart in a future academic year. Yet the evidence of research (including McGivney, 1996; Hayes, 1999) shows that the type of flexibility that many students want is that which allows them to gain credit for 'learning episodes' undertaken in a variety of different adult learning environments, over what can sometimes be an extended period of time. As Whittaker (1994) so accurately puts it, *Would colleges be better off not accepting students who are, or likely to be, pregnant, to get a job,*

become ill, go to another college, suffer domestic problems? There is an implicit conflict between the growth targets and the demands and realisation of ordinary people's lives, exacerbated by a narrow perception of outcomes which does not acknowledge the concept of interrupted learning so common among adult students. Essentially this flaw in the funding methodology works against part-time adult students, who are particularly likely to choose this mode to fit in with the other demands of their lives. (Whittaker, 1994:5)

The development of more sophisticated measures of 'value added' not only supports important learning in current non-schedule 2 provision, but would also be a way of recognising the learning achieved by students who leave before the end of their courses.

It also needs to be recognised that learning episodes should not be seen in a linear way running through the different levels from basic to higher education. As Foster, Howard and Reisenberger (1998) argue, it is much more helpful to see learning as building blocks with individuals working at different levels according to their skills and interests – one may have advanced skills in one area and be a beginner in another.

I have argued that the emphasis now placed on retention and accreditation, because of the funding regime and inspection, does little to measure the quality of some of the most important learning that takes place. Outcomes, which include increased confidence and good inter-personal skills, are valued by employers, (CBI, 1994) but are seldom measured[11] although they can be found integrated into some formal qualifications. The value added to families and communities is not formally recognised and there is a need for research which investigates the non vocational uses to which students put their learning in the years after they leave college, such as contributions to school governing bodies, tenant's associations and voluntary organisations. There is a need for more sophisticated measures of learning and achievement than currently exist (Foster, Howard and Reisenberger, 1998).

The FEFC funding methodology has led to a standardisation of measurement, but also to college practices which optimise funding and distort reality. For example, any student who withdraws between enrolment and the FEFC census date 'does not exist', the college receives no money for pre-entry advice or early attendance, but neither are college achievement or retention statistics affected. In this situation, who is concerned about the reasons for students' early withdrawal from courses and any negative experience an individual may have had?

College managers have developed a range of strategies to improve student retention and achievement rates. For example, they have introduced more rigorous pre-entry screening in an attempt to reduce the number of students who fail to achieve qualifications in the prescribed time. Progress has been made in delivering additional learning support to those students deemed most at risk of failure, with good practice identified and shared through staff development and publications (Hayes, 1996; Martinez, 1997; Martinez, Houghton and Krupska, 1998). Thus, colleges' capacity to survive in the market relies on their ability to manipulate situations to their advantage. Managers need to optimise funding and ensure that performance indicators present them as 'successful'. League tables are not necessarily indicators of student learning so much as education managers' ability to use the system.[12]

Failure to achieve completion and qualification targets in relation to national averages is criticised in inspection reports, and presents a poor performance profile to the outside world. This is potentially damaging to the reputation of the college, which is so important when competing within the local education market. In addition it lowers the morale of staff who know that students are benefiting from provision but have limited tools with which to demonstrate this.

The Chief Inspector's report for 1998/99 expressed concern that 'six years after incorporation a few colleges are still unable to provide an accurate account of their students' progress and achievements'. Whilst criticising the underdeveloped monitoring of student progress, the same report commended the growth in student confidence and motivation. As previously discussed, despite some important pioneering work in this area (WEA, FEDA), the measurement of the full range of learning outcomes, some of which may have been unanticipated, remains problematic.

The high profile of statistical performance data poses a major challenge to those seeking to develop a framework for measuring 'value added'. Can research provide more accurate ways of measuring the value added to the lives of individuals, their families and communities and to the economy, than those already in existence? At the very least, further discussion of the problems and complexity involved might slow down an over-hasty formulation of a funding model which fails to recognise the 'softer' learning outcomes which are key to realising the government's vision of a Learning Society.

The challenge to colleges and their partners

Thus, FE colleges have to work with a number of tensions, the central one of which is simultaneously to meet the demands of the government for a high volume of skilled workers and the needs of students for personalised learning opportunities.

Colleges are required to improve retention and achievement and to use fewer resources to work with more people with few formal qualifications and at the same time to improve academic achievement year on year. Yet research has shown that new adult learners need extra support and time to achieve positive outcomes. Staff have sometimes had to balance the 'business' need to fill courses with the moral imperative to select students who have the potential to be successful. In interview, staff need to be realistic about what study will involve and identify areas where additional support may be needed, yet without eroding the fragile confidence of those who are not secure in their own abilities.

Ways of measuring college performance have become more refined and the scope for 'local interpretation' reduced. Consequently a number of colleges have moved towards financially rewarding programmes. Such courses are typically delivered in large groups, using fast track approaches. This style of course delivery does not lend itself to student centred learning which values personal experience and collaborative learning. There has been an increase in modular programmes, ostensibly to provide a more flexible curriculum for students but also as a strategy to improve retention statistics. For example, flexible programming including modularisation and open learning have been advocated as a response to 'tailoring learning opportunities to fit around students' lifestyles (Carroll, 1991; Theodossin, 1994).[13] These ways of delivering the curriculum can also been seen as a response to minimal college childcare, lack of finance for mature students and pressure for outcomes on students. Roll-on, roll-off programmes are helpful to students because they can start at various points throughout the academic year and are helpful to colleges because they can enrol new students if some withdraw. More short courses allow students to have a 'taste' of further education; they also allow colleges to keep student numbers high throughout the year.

If students leave early it is important for them and colleges that the learning that has taken place has been recognised; for students it is about self-esteem and external recognition of achievement – leaving the door open for the future. It is important to note that students who leave before the end of a course for reasons beyond their control often believe that their circumstances will change over time and allow them to progress in the future (Hayes, 1999).

I would argue that FEFC funding structure has contributed to further education's inability to be responsive to the social and material realities which structure many adult students' lives and that this has resulted in students using all learning opportunities available to them according to their need and circumstances. Students have, with difficulty, created their own 'flexible' provision, selecting from LEA, further education and the voluntary sector. The consequences for colleges where this has resulted in non-completion of courses and non-attainment of qualifications has been serious as this adversely affects funding and inspection grades.

The current performance indicators used to measure outcomes against investment in education marginalise less tangible learner outcomes such as increased confidence, more involvement in public life – in particular time invested in supporting children's education. I believe that the Government's need to demonstrate the relationship between education spending and economic regeneration should take a longer view of 'outcomes' and consider cultural as well as economic regeneration. However, in order for this to happen we need a new framework to measure learning and more research to provide hard evidence of the 'value added' to communities by adult learning.[14] We should welcome the fact that more qualifications are being gained by a broader section of the community than before. However, it is still of concern that some groups are still under-represented and that what counts as achievement is so narrowly defined.

The Government has recognised the success that many voluntary sector organisations have at attracting non-standard learners. These agencies are valuable partners in widening participation. However, the informality that attracts new learners has often resulted in a lack of monitoring and evaluation of learning outcomes. It will be a challenge to colleges and others working with these groups to retain the attractive informality, yet introduce methods of measuring achievement robust enough to meet the requirements of government agencies.

Managers thus have to manage complexity and paradox in a climate of continuous change and

respond to new government initiatives, in order to ensure the future of their colleges. The new Learning and Skills Councils will provide new opportunities and challenges. There is a need for colleges to carry out more rigorous research if the new sector is to be able to articulate its case to government and control its future. I believe that the following questions are key to finding a positive way forward for adult students and learning providers:

1. What are the standards of verification required to confirm that learning has taken place as the result of a particular course/programme?

2. Given the difficulties of measuring the full range of an individual's learning, will authorities accept 'sampling' a percentage of case studies along with other measures of student achievement?

3. What is the place of generic learning? Can the tools developed for the accreditation of Key Skills in areas such as 'working with others' or NVQ management provide a way forward?

4. Is there a distinction to be made between a learning outcome (identified within the course documentation) and an outcome of learning (which may be an unanticipated outcome or a learner defined outcome)?

5. Is it possible to acknowledge long-term and cumulative learning outcomes that may result from participation in a range of different short courses taken over an extended period? – e.g. personal record of achievement?

6. What is, or could be, the role of Open College Networks in developing a national system for measuring the full range of outcomes of adult learning?

7. Are we looking for evidence of value added data which can be an indicator of an individual's performance, or measures of course and institutional performance for national benchmarking?

8. Should a model for measuring 'informal' learning outcomes be confined to non-Schedule 2? – *I suggest not: it has potential to provide evidence of learning for students who leave courses early, thus supporting evaluation of college performance and 'credit' for student who may wish to return to study later.*

9. How can we develop a system which is sufficiently non-threatening to be valued by people who have had few positive experiences of education in the past and/or have minimal language or literacy skills, yet be rigorous enough to satisfy external funders and national standards? Can this be fun using visual materials, audio and video? What can we learn from assessment of learning in Primary Education, Students with Learning Difficulties or Disabilities, the Youth Service, etc.?

Notes

1. Any institutions or services providing courses as defined in the Act, but not themselves incorporated, were able to apply via an incorporated institution to have their schedule 2 programmes funded. A number of colleges have sought 'franchise' arrangements to enhance their student numbers.

2. The Ford Employee Development and Assistance Programme (EDAP) is a joint initiative between trade unions and Ford UK to provide workplace education. The company sponsors employees in their studies that are seen as personal development rather than vocational training.

3. Access courses, modularisation, Flexible Open Learning (FOL), Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL), Credit Accumulation and Transfer Schemes (CATs).

4. The woman student in question returned as a mature student on a back-to-work course. Over the period of several years she gained GCSE maths and English, and took an Access course. She went on to higher education to study journalism. Domestic problems resulted in her taking a 'learning break' for two years and she is now back at university working to complete her degree.

5. A-level standards: the *Independent* (5.8.96, p1) reported 'the A-level pass rate will rise again this year because of changes that allow students to spread revision throughout their courses rather than having to do it all at the end, examination boards predict'. The new 'modular' A-levels, which were taken by up to 51,000 students this year, have raised motivation and have allowed students to drop out early if they are unlikely to pass, the boards say. Under this system, candidates who fail can retake as many times as they like' – The Conservative Government announced that it would accept Sir Ron Dearing's recommendation to limit re-sits for each module, to ensure that modular courses were not seen to be 'softer' than the traditional mode (source *TES* 9.8.96, p2). The examination boards naturally condemned the Government's reaction as ridiculously premature. (source *Guardian* 6.8.96, p4).

6. Discussions at a recent WEA conference were reported at a meeting of the 'Not Schedule 2 Learning Outcomes Group' which met at the City Lit on 24 November 1999.

7. The difficulty of providing reliable student data has been commented on in numerous inspection reports and was described as problematic in many colleges by the FEFC Quality Assessment Committee (FEFC, 1997c). Martinez (1997) research with thirty colleges concluded that the difficulties appear at two levels. First, 'Nationally, the rate of change demanded by funding and inspection authorities and the introduction (and revision) of complex, unitised qualifications, have outstripped the ability of many colleges to cope. Second, National level problems are exacerbated within colleges by the costs of administration, management and technology. (Martinez, 1997:124).

8. The major government concern is in fact performance in international education and training league tables.

9. College staff may be sympathetic to the needs of students but if a student fails to complete a course within the time allotted to that qualification by the FEFC, then the college will not receive payment for the additional course units. Colleges are thus limited in how patient they can be.

10. A National Framework for Credit which would recognise interim achievement, was advocated by the Kennedy committee (Kennedy, 1997) The government green paper *The learning age* recognises the need for a national credit framework but does not present it as a priority for early realisation.

11. GNVQ additional units recognise skills such as teamwork.

12. There has been a growth in courses and consultancy dealing with optimisation of the FEFC funding methodology, e.g. Network Training.

13. Examples of colleges' responses to making the curriculum more flexible include: Lewisham and Woolwich Colleges have unitised a number of curriculum areas; Wulfrum College with Bilston Community College and Wolverhampton TEC operate an Open Learning Centre which caters for approximately 800 students. Detailed in Martinez (1997).

14. Birkbeck and the Institute of Education are currently carrying out research for the DfEE on the Wider Benefits of Learning.

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Encouraging adult achievement

Anna Reisenberger

Introduction

This paper aims to stimulate debate on the kind of framework needed to support and recognise adult achievement outside the formal qualification framework in the new post-16 sector. It has developed from discussions within FEDA on the need to encourage access for more adult learners, but also to ensure that they have a positive experience of learning that leads to progress and success. It builds on development work FEDA has undertaken to recognise the broad range of adult learning, to raise achievement, to promote quality and to support adult participation in lifelong learning.

The paper sets out the context of the new debate and suggests key principles for provision of learning opportunities for adults – provision that encourages achievement even if it does not lead to qualifications, and that should be supported by state funding.

1. Context

The debate on how to assess the outcomes of adult learning and measure them in a way that is meaningful to learners and other stakeholders is not new, but has been given added impetus by the *Learning to succeed* White Paper (1999). Its policy aims include raising basic skill levels, widening adult participation, combating social exclusion, and giving more coherence to the range of adult learning taking place in different contexts. It promises to break down the artificial divide between schedule 2 provision (mainly leading to qualifications and funded by FEFC) and non-schedule 2 provision (sometimes called non-vocational or recreational provision). The Learning and Skills Bill currently before parliament breaks down previous distinctions between full- and part-time education (Learning and Skills Bill 1999, clause 3.4.a). The bill defines training as including vocational, social, physical and recreational (3.4.c), and gives the new council the duty to encourage individuals and employers to participate in post-16 education and its provision (clauses 4a and 4b).

The new national Learning and Skills Council will have separate adult and youth committees and a separate adult learning inspectorate, although joint inspections will take place where there is mixed provision. The funding regime may introduce significant differences in subsidising provision for 16–19-year-olds and more mature students. Moreover the remit of the Learning and Skills Council will extend beyond the college to cover a range of contexts where adults may be learning: in the workplace or learning centres, at college, in LEA or community provision.

Current funding systems in much post-16 provision, but not LEA adult education, are based on payments for entry (starts), on programme (retention), and for achievement (a limited range of outcomes such as qualifications in FE colleges or employment for programmes for unemployed adults). A full consultation on the new funding methodology is promised and already the issue of adult achievement has been flagged:

In cases like Adult and Community Learning, or provision for unemployed adults, it may be inappropriate to limit outcome payments to the acquisition of conventional qualifications. We would welcome debate on these issues even in advance of the proposed May consultation. (*Learning to succeed: post-16 Funding and Allocation*. First Technical Consultation. Paragraph 2.7)

2. Purposes

A key issue is whether a framework to encourage not only adult participation but also adult achievement can be devised which serves several purposes.

Ideally it should:

- Meet the needs of different stakeholders: providers, employers, funders and inspectors
- Meet the needs of learners, only some of whom want qualifications, though all may want recognition
- Recognise the different contexts in which learning takes place, e.g. college, adult education, voluntary sector, workplace, ILT centres, home
- Demonstrate learning, not just participation, has taken place: i.e. identify the student's access, progress and success
- Inform a new funding regime (both tariff and quality thresholds for funding through LSCs)
- Contribute to a common inspection framework
- Provide measures that can help the Government demonstrate an increase in 'lifelong learning'.

3. Recognising learning

Much of the debate about adult education since the Further and Higher Education Act (1992) has centred on the schedule 2/non-schedule 2 divide that led to a division in the funding for college and local authority provision. Many in adult and community education felt that this created an unhelpful hierarchy, which devalued 'informal' learning. They have argued for the importance of subsidising learning that encourages participation, without the pressure on new students of undergoing external assessment for accreditation. Learning which takes place in employment may also eschew accreditation in order to serve the need of the employer or learner for 'just in time' learning to meet particular job requirements.

The emerging plans for the Learning and Skills Council promise the end of the distinction created by schedule 2 of the Further and Higher Education Act:

Whilst qualifications are very important and accreditation will continue to be appropriate for the majority of courses, we also want to see the LSC provide opportunities with scope for learners to gain recognition for their achievements other than through qualifications. (Learning and Skills Council Prospectus. Paragraph 5.27)

In the college sector performance indicators for achievement are based on numbers of students acquiring qualifications. This is thought by some to distort provision for adults, as other kinds of achievement are not recognised and are not rewarded in published performance data. Providers may encourage students to enrol for qualification-bearing courses even though this is not their learning goal; for example, a college may only offer courses in foreign languages that lead to qualifications as they currently receive much more subsidy.

Standard national qualifications will still be key drivers for:

- Learners – as a nationally recognised passport to further learning and jobs,

as well as for:

- Government – as a measure that standards are rising and targets met
- Employers – as an understandable currency and as selection criteria.

The apparent tension can be resolved by recognising that adult learners come with different needs and aspirations, depending on their personal characteristics, life circumstances and prior achievements. A model proposed by Paul Martinez in Raising Achievement, to be published by FEDA in March 2000, looks at the relationship between students' motivation to learn and their motivation to achieve a qualification.

Martinez identifies four broad groups of students and the types of provision that might attract them:

- With high motivation to achieve and low motivation to learn: 'students who need professional qualifications' or 'have a largely instrumental approach to the learning which they need to accomplish'
- With a high motivation to learn and achieve: 'students on a variety of return to learn and access courses (to both further and higher education)'
- With a high motivation to learn but low motivation to get a qualification: 'students on craft or personal development or foreign language courses'
- With a low motivation to learn and to achieve qualifications. This group might include those who are 'unwilling students dispatched by their employers ... or Job Centres' etc., those 'who wish primarily to gain access to facilities' and those 'with a tentative commitment to learning and assessment because of a lack of confidence or previous disappointments'.

Even where they are not interested in formal qualifications, most of these students will want some recognition of their learning. There must be arrangements for regular feedback to students to help them assess how they are progressing and support their learning. Formative assessment can serve different purposes from terminal assessment; it reinforces motivation by giving feedback and recognition that can contribute to overall assessment. Terminal assessment rewards the learner and provider with tangible measures of the outcomes of learning.

4. Other accepted measures of achievement

Qualifications dominate the discourse in further education but are not the only measure of achievement. Even in the school sector, pupils' performance is assessed against national standards or measures at Key Stages 1,2, and 3 before they reach Key Stage 4 and external examinations. In the FE Sector, programmes accredited by the National Open College Network are funded, although there has been a gradual tightening of criteria for local accreditation since 1993.

The current arrangements for inspecting LEA adult education by OFSTED/HMI assess broader indicators of adult achievement, including personal learning goals. Even the current FEFC inspection framework acknowledges a wide range of achievements, and covers designated adult institutions and the WEA, where the majority of courses do not lead to qualifications. Indicative sources of evidence suggested in the inspection framework (*Validating self-assessment, FEFC circulars 97/12 and 97/13*) include students' practical and written work as sources of achievement. But these do not count for FEFC performance indicators and targets and, as inspection reports now take note of retention and achievement data, colleges with a predominance of adults on 'non-schedule 2' courses are finding it hard to achieve the highest grades.

Helena Kennedy's report on widening participation, *Learning works* (1997), sets out the conditions to improve access for students who lack confidence or who have had bad early experiences of learning. As part of its Widening Participation strategy the Further Education Funding Council for England (FEFC) has established 'non-schedule 2 pilots' to encourage provision for excluded groups such as travellers, without the funding being dependent on achievement of qualifications. This initiative acknowledges the needs of 'tentative' learners described in group 4 above, at the same time as the FEFC is tightening up on achievement data. The imperative to evaluate the effectiveness of such initiatives is a further reason to explore appropriate means of reporting achievement.

5. Meeting the needs of key stakeholders

Any framework, which both recognises and encourages adult achievement, would need to address the requirements of different stakeholders. The Government, for example, has an interest in quantifiable outcomes, so that national targets can be measured. Employers and learners may be more interested than the State in the appropriateness of the content of specific courses to local or personal needs.

The Government is concerned that state-subsidised provision meets its twin aims of widening participation to combat social exclusion, and raising standards to meet the skill challenge. The new participation target (to reduce non-learners by 7%) accommodates a broad definition of learning, including both taught and non-taught learning. This broader view of participation does not, however, extend to broader measures of achievement. But acceptance of broader measures of achievement are needed if we are to encourage adults not only to participate once, but to be motivated to become

regular lifelong learners.

Taking the learner's perspective, A sense of achievement: outcomes of adult learning (1997) identified that:

All learning opportunities should be able to demonstrate that they have helped students to:

- *Increase their confidence*
- *Improve their capacity to continue or apply the learning*
- *Deepen their knowledge or understanding*
- *Acquire new skills (either in relation to their subject or interpersonal skills).*

These priorities are confirmed by recent DfEE research into Pathways in adult learning (1999), which shows nearly half of courses had helped boost the individual's confidence and nearly a quarter had encouraged people to take on further learning.

In practical terms the minimum prerequisites for courses to help students achieve these broad outcomes would include that:

- The tutor clarifies what the student can expect to gain
- The learner says what they want to gain
- The likely ways of learning and of demonstrating that the learning has happened are clear
- The support students can expect is explicit and the organisation is realistic about what it can and cannot offer.

Examples of programmes and processes that exemplify these characteristics are described in A sense of achievement and in Raising achievement. They include learning diaries, records of achievement, learning outcomes, identification of outcomes from 'leisure' courses, a format for assessing and recording learning and confidence gains, learning contracts and modular access programmes.

Formats for the collection of evidence of learning gain must be simple enough to be used by students who lack confidence in basic skills. They must also be robust enough to provide a collective view of a group's learning; they must be capable of providing comparable data; and finally, they must be sensitive to different contexts.

6. Threshold criteria

All stakeholders will have an interest in ensuring that provision meets quality criteria. Minimum standards, which could be expected of institutions in receipt of public funding for provision of such learning opportunities, might include having:

- Qualified staff
- Student support structures
- Guidance before, during and after a programme
- A student charter
- A recorded level of student satisfaction
- Certain recruitment, retention and achievement levels
- Appropriate level of resources
- Evidence of needs assessment and planning provision to meet needs
- Recognition of and records of individual achievement.

Key principles for funded programmes or learning opportunities for adults might include having:

- Planned and specified outcomes from the learning experience
- Allowing diverse outcomes to suit individual need
- An initial assessment or record of prior learning
- Formative assessment to give feedback as learning progresses

- Assessment of achievement or a record which demonstrates student progress and the added value of the learning experience
- Assessment methods appropriate to the learning and to the adult learner
- Content that includes broad key skills
- Individual recognition of learning gain
- Available, accessible and explicit progression routes
- Content approved by or acceptable to Government for funding.

The last element recognises the fact that the Government cannot fund everything and expects the main beneficiaries of a learning opportunity to contribute to its costs, if they can afford to do so.

A core principle must be that there is demonstrable learning gain for which evidence can be recorded. The learner's progress could be measured against either externally offered criteria or the learner's own goals. For example, key questions to be asked at the beginning, middle and end of a learning episode could include how autonomous is the learner, how much has been learned, and under what circumstances is the learning applied or evidenced.

We would recommend the main principles act as 'threshold criteria', in effect forming the basis of a licence to operate. Clearly some would also be assessed in regular inspections of providers across the sector.

7. Regulatory frameworks

Content, level and size of learning episodes need to be measured so that funding agencies and other stakeholders can compare like with like. We therefore propose that all learning opportunities are defined as standard units, but these need to be flexible enough to cater for a wide range of learning. Current moves towards unitisation are to be welcomed and will greatly assist data handling and will enable adult learners to accumulate learning in small chunks. But to meet the demand for programmes tailored to individual needs and portable learning taking place over a period of time, we would argue for a full credit framework for adult learners. This will enable recognition to be given to adult learning gained through a variety of routes (learning at work, through distance learning and new technology, in college and in the community).

A national scheme for approving adult learning leading to national standards could be locally administered. This might be through local Learning and Skills Councils (LSCs) approving provision, which meets the national standards and local priorities. It would be inspected by the new Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI).

This would address the funding and inspection issues, but the 'awarding body' role, quality assuring accreditation given to individual learners, would need to be covered too. An FEFC 'Feasibility study for an approvals process for FEFC funded programmes within Schedule 2(d) to (j) of the 1992 FHE Act' (September 1997: unpublished) includes a model for a national body overseeing a kite-marking scheme run by awarding bodies (including Open College Networks) who approve courses. Individual learners' achievement is recognised through an Access to FE framework. This model was not designed to apply to adult learning outside Schedule 2(d) to 2(j) (courses which have progression to qualification-bearing courses) but could do so.

However, the Learning and Skills Council Prospectus (1999) makes clear that the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) will be the body to approve qualifications 'to ensure that only qualifications that meet high quality standards will be publicly funded' (*Learning and Skills Council prospectus*. Paragraph 5)

One of the main principles in *Modernising government* carried through into *Learning to succeed* is that intervention should be in inverse proportion to need. A recent report from the Better Regulation Task Force makes the case for more self-regulation in the public sector in terms of the gains in flexibility, expertise and cost-effectiveness. Mick Fletcher points out in his paper *Learning and Skills as a mutual enterprise* that, whilst the encouragement of local partnerships points to an increase in trust, arrangements for inspection seem to 'move away from trust' (the sort of trust exemplified in FEFC's *Validating self-assessment*). The emphasis now is more on external arrangements for inspection separated from quality improvement: 'It raises fears that energy will be spent on proving quality rather than improving it'.

Quality standards must be clear and must be verified through inspection. However a highly specified

system may, by limiting trust, discourage innovative and 'risky' learning ventures which engage a wider range of adult learners in new learning contexts. We would therefore argue against over-elaboration of threshold principles or the quality indicators for inspection.

8. Incentives for achievement and progression

Rewarding only certain kinds of achievement can distort provision by acting as perverse incentives; for example, higher levels of funding for particular qualifications can lead to duplication and can drive out 'uneconomic' courses, leaving certain skill needs or groups of students without provision. The new Learning and Skills Council must take a broad view of their duty to 'encourage participation'. Incentives to raise participation and achievement should be scrutinised to see if they have a benign impact on all stakeholders: individual learners, providers and employers. Incentives to providers must promote quality improvement, not simply compliance.

Incentives to promote achievement might include:

- Financial support for poorer learners that includes materials and exam fees
- Incentives for employers for percentage of employees in 'approved' learning
- Allowing unemployed adults on skills shortage courses to study full-time and to the end of courses.

Incentives to promote progression might include:

- An achievement bonus for providers for qualifications achieved, progression to further learning or percentage of students satisfied the course has met their needs
- Exit funding based on provision of learning records and next steps guidance, for individuals
- Allowing learners to 'bank' units towards qualifications with a bonus on completion.

As well as encouraging the provider, incentives must give learners a sense of achievement and encourage them to continue through whatever routes suit them. The recent national survey of adult learners (Pathways in adult learning 1999) has reinforced what we know about non-participants: they are likely to be older, working class, less well qualified, unemployed. It has also demonstrated the complexity of learning pathways: progression is lateral or zigzag as well as upwards; employment is an important route into participation in learning; people move between taught and 'non-taught' learning episodes. The longer people have been involved in learning the more likely they are to plan further learning.

We need to make it as easy to drop back into learning as it is to 'drop out'.

Conclusion

The introduction of an adult learning inspectorate and new adult learning is a unique opportunity to revisit the mechanisms through which we fund and promote adult learning that does not lead to qualifications. If we are to widen participation at the same time as raising standards, we need to meet the needs of less committed learners as well as of the economy. We need to provide incentives for them to gain a sense of achievement through learning and so progress in lifelong learning.

This paper has suggested that there are key principles, which promote learning and adult learners' achievement and which can be used as a basis for public funding for a wide range of providers and courses. It argues that by setting such standards, and having standard units of learning, a framework could be developed which is flexible enough to meet the needs of all stakeholders. A simple system with national standards that are transparent and not over-specified is needed. We need to design future frameworks that are based on learners' intermittent study in different contexts and modes, not base it on past concepts of learners who adapted their learning to the providers and courses on offer.

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How we recognise and value the broader outcomes of adult learning is a matter for continuous debate. The Learning and Skills Council will have responsibility for a wide range of learners who will learn in different ways and different environments.
The challenge is how to devise robust standards, which are sensitive to the needs of all potential learners, if we are to encourage adults and disenchanted young people to become lifelong learners.

The papers in this collection, three of which were presented at the Further Education Research Network (FERN) conference in December 1999, are being published jointly by FEDA and NIACE to stimulate debate in the sector and to set the agenda for further development work.

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